

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL 1, 1871.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MORNING DREAM.

THE bells of Hurst Leet church wafted their melodious sound up to Harebell Farm in the stillness of the Sabbath morning. When the wind set this way, their chimes could be heard distinctly. The thick mist of the previous night—when Mr. Owen had walked to the two-acre meadow and seen the men stealing up Harebell Lane on their way to the Trailing Indian—had given place to a clear atmosphere. The air was bright, the sun shone, the skies were blue. Generally speaking, Hurst Leet bells only gave out a brief ding-dong, to show the world that it was Sunday; to-day they were ringing. It was the custom of Hurst Leet church at that period to administer the Sacrament four times in the year: at Christmas and Easter; at Midsummer and Michaelmas. On those occasions the bells rang cheerily for a few minutes at early morning. This was Easter Sunday.

Mary Barber was laying the cloth for breakfast when the bells broke out; the sound caught her ear through the open window. She turned sharply round to look at the cuckoo clock against the wall. It wanted ten minutes to eight.

"I was sure it was behind," she exclaimed to herself testily. "That clock's always getting itself slow now."

Robert Owen came down the stairs, before the words had well left her lips, and entered the room. Never was the man's singular beauty more remarkable than on a Sunday morning; when he was always dressed as a gentleman. He looked rather surprised not to see the breakfast laid: for the farm was punctual in its habits and sat down precisely at eight on a Sunday; on week days at seven.

"You be down to the minute, master," was her greeting. "And I be late."

It was so very unusual a thing for Mary Barber to be "late" that Mr. Owen slightly lifted his eyebrows at the acknowledgment. "Your mistress is late too," he observed, "and will not be down for some minutes. She has had a bad night."

"What I did was to drop asleep just as I ought to have been a getting up," said Mary Barber. "I have had a bad night too—in one sense: and I've a great mind to tell you, master, *why*."

Her manner, as she said it, was very peculiar. Mr. Owen, who had gone to the open window and was listening to the bells, turned and looked at her.

"I have had an ugly dream, master. Two dreams in one, as may be said; for I woke between 'em; and then went to sleep and dreamed it on again. 'Twas about you."

Mary Barber was superstitious in the matter of dreams. She did not have them often. Very rarely. It must be confessed that two or three times in her life her dreams had appeared to foreshadow coming events—events that afterwards happened. When a young woman, she had dreamed of the death of her father, and told the dream: some few days subsequently, his death, which was quite unexpected, took place.

Robert Owen smiled. He was one of the least superstitious men living: would as soon have put faith in a ghost as a dream.

"Yes, sir," she said, the smile somewhat nettling her, "I know how you'll ridicule all I say. But I think I'd better say it, for all that. There's some ill in store for you, master; so take care of yourself."

"Is the ill ghostly or bodily?" he rejoined. And Mary Barber did not like the evident mockery, good natured though it was.

"Bodily, I should imagine," was the half defiant answer, as the teaspoons were rattled into the saucers. "Listen to me while I tell you, master," she added; "it will be off my conscience."

"You had better be quick about it then, or you will have your mistress down," he said in resignation. "It may be as well not to tell dreams to her, if they are ugly ones."

She finished putting the things in their places on the cloth, and then stood by the side of the table, facing him. Mr. Owen was at the open window still, listening to the bells.

"Master, I thought in my sleep that it was to-day dawning; this very same Easter Sunday that *is*. All of us here seemed to be in a peck o' trouble; in great distress: and it was about you. You had to go somewhere: I don't know why or wherefore. It seemed to us that if you did go, some awful ill would come of it; ill to you; we knew that it would; and yet there seemed no help for it; never a thought crossed any of us to say Don't go. It seemed just one o' them things

that *must be*, that's as sure as night or day; there was no question of passing it. We were in frightful distress; it was worse than any we can ever feel in this world; sharper and more real. Dreams are vivid; I often think they picture things a bit like what they'll be in heaven, that is, when we shall no longer see through a glass darkly. There was never such distress in this house, master, as we seemed to be in then, and because you had to go: it was just a keen anguish. The whole lot of us were crying bitterly."

"What do you call the 'whole lot?'" questioned Robert Owen, as she paused.

"I don't know. I think my missis and the young lasses were here; I know it was home; this farm, these rooms; and several of us stood about. The only face I clearly remember was Joan's: she was sitting down on that chair by the ironing-board in the kitchen, her hands clasped on her linsey apron, and her eyes hot and red with tears. Nobody but you seemed to be unconcerned, master."

"Oh, I did, did I?"

"You were moving about among us; I saw you more than once. But you seemed not to notice us, and not to feel any of the trouble that we felt. 'When's the master going?' I said to Joan; and I woke before she had time to answer."

"Is that all?" cried the master, far more absorbed by the bells, whose sound he loved, than by the tale.

"No, master; it's not all. I woke up with the distress, as it seemed; and I thought to myself what a strange dream. I wondered what the time o' night was, and got up and looked from the window. Dawn was just a glimmering, and I saw the mist had cleared. I got into bed, dropped asleep, and was in the dream again. The same dream, master; it seemed to go on just as if I'd never woke. Joan was standing by the same chair, not sitting then, and she was cleaned now, and had got her best things on. But you were gone, master: and I saw, as plainly as I could ever see awake, her red and swollen eyes. The house seemed to be in the same awful distress as before—it couldn't be worse—and we never could feel it like that in life. We all set off to look for you, master, a great lot of us, it was, but we knew in our hearts that, look as we would, you would never again come back to us: we knew it as certainly as we can know anything in this world. All the same, we ran, crying sadly; some went up the lane, and some went over the fields, and some hadn't got beyond the fold-yard: but all of us bearing off for the same point, as it were: and all a looking for you."

"Which point? The moon?"

"The Trailing Indian," she answered, too much wrapt in her tale to resent the words. "At least, it was that direction that we all seemed to be making for. I was one o' them in the lane, and I awoke with

the running. This clock was striking half-after five, master; and I sat up on end in bed, and asked myself what the strange dream could mean. The tears stood in my eyes, and the sweat was on my brow, with the sorrow and the running. I've never hardly had such a life-like dream as that."

Mr. Owen made no answer.

"I lay a thinking what it could mean. Then I went and called Joan, for 'twas time; and, after that, I lay thinking again. Just as I ought to have got up, I dropped asleep: and that has made us late, master."

Mr. Owen bent his ear to catch the last chime of the bells. To him they were as of the sweetest melody.

"And, master, I'm not able to tell what it means, though it has never been for a minute out o' my thoughts since I got up. But, as sure as can be, it forebodes some ill for you."

"The bells have finished," said Mr. Owen, as the vibration of their sound was dying slowly away. "Mary, woman, I'd not let a foolish dream disturb me, if I were you."

"I know that it makes just as much impression upon you, sir, as if I'd said I had read it in the newspaper," returned Mary Barber tartly. "But I've told it you; and my conscience is, so far, at ease: and I'd say further, take what care you can of yourself. That's all, master."

She whisked out of the room, brought in a dish of ham, and set it on the table with a dash. Mr. Owen had his prayerbook in his hand, looking out the proper psalms for the Easter service.

"Master, what ails Mr. George Arde and his wife, that they can't come over to-day for their Easter dinner?" resumed Mary Barber in a different tone, for she had done with the other subject for good. "Our chiscakes 'ill be good enough for gentlefolks, I'll answer for't."

"Cheesecakes!—it is not a question of cheesecakes," he answered, with a sigh. "Polly is not strong enough to come. Unless I am mistaken, this is the last Easter she'll see in this world."

"Perhaps if she'd make an effort, master, she might ha' got here," suggested Mary Barber in a softer tone—for the answer somewhat appeased the resentment she was feeling against things generally, and especially against herself for having dropped asleep when she ought to have got up. "Our chiscakes is beautiful, this Easter: and Miss Polly always was fond of 'em. The baby might ha' pecked a bit, too. Miss Maria never cared for 'em as Miss Polly did."

"We must send her some, Mary Barber."

"Ay, master, that us will. I don't like to hear of her getting worse. At Christmas she looked like nothing but a drooping snowdrop. Tom was enough to go, without——"

"Hush!—here's your mistress," was the warning interruption.

Mrs. Owen entered; and not a word more was spoken on either of the two subjects that master and maid had just then at heart: she the

dream; he, his daughter's failing strength. Mrs. Owen was in too delicate health herself to be troubled unnecessarily.

Again Robert Owen stayed to partake of the Sacrament after morning service; and again Mrs. Owen (she was in the habit of staying), and the parson equally wondered. Geoffry Clanwaring and his wife also stayed—for the first time together. Sir Dene was in his pew as usual; but afforded himself no opportunity of speaking to Geoffry and Maria. He always came out of church when the congregation, including his son and daughter-in-law, had departed.

Things were going on quietly between Sir Dene and Geoffry. They met frequently on business matters, and Sir Dene seemed cordial: now and then he would say, "How's your wife, Geoff?" But Geoffry had not been invited to take a meal at Beechhurst since that luncheon, already told of: his visits there were confined to business ones in Sir Dene's parlour. If any rare necessity brought Sir Dene to the Bailiff's lodge, he would shake hands with Maria, and speak very kindly.

Sir Dene was alone this Easter. John Clanwaring had sent a wordy excuse for not quitting London. The heir was engaged to be married now, and his ladye-love had claims on his time. Geoffry, knowing all this, had wondered whether Sir Dene might open his heart and invite him and his wife to partake of dinner at Beechhurst. But nothing of the kind took place.

They went up to dine at Harebell Farm, and stayed there the rest of the day. Maria was grievously disappointed not to meet her sister.

"Is Polly so much worse that she could not come, mamma?" she asked.

"I don't think it is exactly that," said Mrs. Owen. "She is very weak and delicate, you know; but I suppose she could have come. George Arde has a bad cold, your father says; nearly laid up with it. They have a fresh nurse-girl, too. Polly had to send away the other."

Yes, Mr. Owen, to his wife, had put the non-coming for the Easter dinner upon any trivial excuse, rather than the true one—Mary Arde's fading life. And so the cheesecakes were eaten without them, and the day passed.

The night was bright, quite different from the previous one; it was almost as light as day. When Geoffry Clanwaring and his wife were departing after supper, Mr. Owen put on his cap to walk part of the way with them.

"I should think that cap of yours will never wear out, papa," saucily observed Maria.

"It does not get fresher," returned Mr. Owen; "but it is good for a cold night, lass."

This cap had been a standing joke with Robert Owen's daughters. It was of sealskin, originally bought for travelling; was expensive and considered very handsome, in accordance with the taste of the day. A

year or two ago, when it was growing worn and shabby, Mr. Owen had taken it into night use : one evening, in standing over the candle to read a letter, the front of it had got woefully singed ; burnt, in fact. Mary Barber, who never would see anything wasted that could possibly be used, edged it round with some white fleecy fur. It rendered it more comfortable than before : but certainly not more ornamental ; for it made one think of a magpie.

"Robert, won't you put your great coat on?" asked Mrs. Owen, as she followed them to the outer door.

"I think I will," he answered, turning back to take it from the peg. "The air is frosty."

She stood a minute at the door watching them along the path that led round to the side of the house, Maria arm-in-arm with her husband ; Mr. Owen buttoning his coat, his favourite stick in his hand. A chill seemed to take her and run right through her frame ; she hastily shut the door and returned to the fire.

"What be you shivering at, missis?" questioned Mary Barber.

"It is cold at that open door," answered Mrs. Owen. "I have felt a little shivery all the evening. This best parlour is not half as warm as the other."

It was then ten o'clock. Mary Barber, busy in the kitchen, helping Joan to put things straight, did not come in again for nearly an hour. Mrs. Owen had dropped into a doze over the fire, and woke up with a start.

"Dear me ! I was asleep. What's the time, Mary?"

"Hard upon eleven, missis."

"Hard upon eleven !" echoed Mrs. Owen. "Why, where can the master be ? He must have gone all the way with them."

"It's a rare fine night," responded Mary Barber—as if tacitly implying that the fact might have tempted her master on.

Mrs. Owen put the Bible on the table against her husband should come in. Mary Barber sat down on the other side the fire ; and they waited on, talking of various things. Joan wanted a whole afternoon's holiday on the morrow—and a "whole" afternoon dated in Joan's vocabulary from one o'clock in the day. Mary Barber did not approve of Mrs. Owen's having consented to Joan's taking it ; and said so. The cuckoo clock struck half-past eleven.

"Why, where *can* he be?" exclaimed Mrs. Owen.

Wondering did not bring an answer. The time went on to twelve. Mrs. Owen was in a state of great surprise then, somewhat of alarm.

"Mary, do you *think* he can be staying all this while at Maria's?"

"Not unless him and Mr. Geoffry Clanwaring have got smoking a pipe together, missis. And that's not over likely."

"But, even if they had, the master would not stay all this while."

The house was very still : nothing to be heard but the ticking of the cuckoo clock, that came faintly through the open door of the other

parlour. Joan was in bed and asleep, recruiting herself against the morrow's pleasure; Parkes, the man who slept in-doors, was also in bed. The clock ticked on for another half-hour: and with every minute Mrs. Owen's uneasiness grew greater.

"Mary, it will soon be one," she said in excitement. "It is not possible but that something must have happened to him! Perhaps he has fallen down somewhere and hurt himself."

"The best thing, missis, for you to do, is to go to bed."

"Go to bed! Nonsense, Mary. I could not sleep if I did. You must call Parkes; and let him go out and look for his master."

"It'll take more time and trouble to waken Parkes than to go myself," was Mary Barber's answer. "Once that man gets asleep, there's no rousing him till work-time i' the morning. I'll go, missis."

If a thought crossed Mrs. Owen that she should feel very lonely all alone, she suppressed it. Mary Barber was even then putting on her bonnet and warm cloak. Her mistress flung a shawl over her shoulders and went with her to the corner of the house where she could see the fold-yard. They both listened for a minute, hoping to hear footsteps: but not a sound broke the night's stillness.

"Take the open road down Dene Hollow, Mary. That's the way he'd come up: perhaps you may meet him."

Now it is a positive fact, and one often spoken to by Mary Barber afterwards, that with the relating of the dream to her master in the morning, it had gone out of her memory. What with the preparation of the good cheer, deemed necessary for Easter Sunday and for the visit of Mr. Geoffrey Clanwaring and his wife, and with the scuffle, it was, to get out to afternoon service herself, and to let Joan get out; in short, what with the bustle of the day altogether, Mary Barber's mind had been fully occupied, and she had not once remembered the dream. Never at all. As she crossed the stile into Harebell Lane, some night bird flew, with a cry, across the trees higher up, its wings making a great rush and whirr.

"That's a owl," thought Mary Barber, turning her face full towards the sound. "I hate them owls."

All at once, in that moment, as she stood gazing up the lane, the dream came flashing into her memory. Just as it had been in the dream, so it was now in reality—Mr. Owen was missing and being looked after. Only, in the dream there had been a good many of them looking, and here it was but herself. So intensely did the fact—nay, the fear—come home to Mary Barber, that her arms dropped by her side as if a weight had pulled them.

With a feeling of certainty, that no persuasion could have shaken,—with a dread fear that seemed to catch her heart and hold it,—with a shivering sensation that perhaps she had never in her life, save once, experienced, the conviction crossed her that it was in that upward

direction she ought to search, not the other. And Mary Barber had all but started up the lane at the top of her speed.

But, even with the most superstitious and fanciful, common sense must, and does, in a degree exert its sway. It told Mary Barber that there would be no *reason* in looking for her master in the opposite direction to that he had been bound upon. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, likely to have taken him up Harebell Lane, especially when he had been going the other way. But, had she started as impulse led her, it would have been the very exemplification of her dream—when she and others had been flying along the lane; for what particular point she knew not, only that it was in the direction of the Trailing Indian.

"It's very odd," she said to herself with a sigh, as she turned about the other way—and her heart felt like a lump of lead. "How was it I forgot the dream all day long?—and why should it ha' come rushing over me as I looked up the lane at the cry of that bird? Was it the sight o' the lane brought it back, I wonder? But what's odder than all the rest, is the fact that master should be missing as he was in the dream; and that I should ha' come out after him."

Very quickly she went on now; not exactly with a run, but at a sharp walking trot that was faster. Under the park wall of Beechhurst Dene went she, turning off opposite its front gates, down the smooth road of Dene Hollow, so cold and white in the frosty moonlight. A few minutes brought her to the bailiff's lodge, Geoffry Clanwaring's humble residence now.

That Mr. Owen was not lingering there, appeared pretty evident; the house was closely shut up, its upper curtains drawn. By dint of knocking for a few minutes, Mary Barber succeeded in arousing Geoffry Clanwaring. He opened his chamber window, and looked out.

"Is the master here, sir?" asked Mary, standing back against the shrubs to look up.

"What's it you, Mary Barber?" he exclaimed. "Your master? No, he is not here. Why did you think he was?"

"Didn't he come here, sir, with you and Miss Maria?"

"No. He came with us as far as the new road; and then turned back. He said he was going to look at a sick cow: Lightfoot, I think he called it."

Maria's head appeared beside her husband's shoulder. A thought had struck her.

"Is mamma taken ill, Mary Barber?"

"Not she," replied Mary Barber. "Why should you think that, Miss Maria?" For Mary rarely gave the young lady her new matronly title; the other was more familiar.

"Then why should you have come after papa? What is it that's the matter?"

"There's nothing the matter, except that he has not come home."

"Oh, is that all," returned Maria, carelessly; and neither she nor her husband appeared to have an idea that it was so late. Suddenly aroused from sleep, they were naturally confused. "Then why need you have come?" repeated Mrs. Clanwaring.

Mary Barber possessed a large share of prudent reticence. It occurred to her that she need not further alarm this young girl—who was not altogether in strong health—by saying all she feared. "We got a wondering where the master could be stopping, Miss Maria—and your mamma wanted to go to bed," she said. "That's why I come."

"Well, I hope you have liked your walk—and you've given me a fright besides. Good night, Mary; I wish you a pleasant ramble back again."

"Mr. Owen is sure to have been with Lightfoot," added Geoffry. "You will find him at home when you get back. Good night."

He closed the window; and Mary Barber turned slowly away, the weight at her heart ten times greater. Had Lightfoot been dead or dying, he would not have stayed with the animal all that while. An awful prevision lay on Mary Barber—that he was dead. He, her master.

It had been calm and still as she went down, but now a breeze had arisen; stirring gently the branches of the trees, passing through them with a slight moan. The shadows played on the white road up Dene Hollow; Mary Barber thought of that other shadow that her mother professed to have seen, and shivered a little as she passed the spot. What with the remembrances attaching to the road, and this present midnight dread, things looked to her a little ghastly.

A quick, firm step on the upper path. Mary Barber heard it, and her heart leaped with hope. But it proved not to be her master. It was Mr. Priar. They met at the corner opposite Sir Dene's lodge. The surgeon looked thunderstruck at seeing her.

"Why, Mary Barber! What brings you abroad here at this hour?"

A brief, mutual explanation ensued. Mr. Priar was on his way from the Trailing Indian, to which inn he had been summoned in desperate haste some few hours before.

"What on earth for?" demanded Mary Barber. "Who's ill?"

He told her who—at least, as well as his knowledge of facts allowed him. That afternoon a comely young woman, footsore and tired with walking, made her unexpected appearance at the inn door, in search of Mr. Michael Geach, whose wife she announced herself to be. Geach went into a towering passion, abused her for coming after him, and ordered her away again. She refused to go; and a general quarrel ensued. What with the fatigue, and the excitement of the quarrel upon it, the young woman was taken ill. Her symptoms grew serious; Mr. Priar was sent for, and arrived in time to usher an infant into the world.

"Well, I'm sure!" cried Mary Barber, when she had listened to the story. "Geach?—Geach? I've heard that name afore now."

"He is an acquaintance of Black's," said Mr. Priar. "Some loose fellow, who appears by fits and starts at the Trailing Indian."

"Is the young woman his wife?"

Mr. Priar gave his mouth a twist, clearly distinguishable in the moonlight. "If required to produce her marriage 'lines,' I fancy she might have some difficulty in doing it," said he. "Black turned virtuous over it, I hear: he is annoyed that she should be laid up there. She is very ill, poor thing."

"Did you see my master at the Trailing Indian?" resumed Mary Barber. "Or in the lane as you came along it?"

"No. I should hardly be likely to see him at the Trailing Indian. As to the lane, it seemed more lonely than ever to-night, as if not a soul had been in it for ages."

He was making a movement to pass on, naturally wanting to get home to rest. Mary Barber put her hand on his arm and detained him.

"James Priar"—she had called him so before in solemn moments: and this seemed to be one of the most solemn she had ever passed—"there's a feeling upon me that some great ill has happened to the master. I think he is dead."

"Dead! Mr. Owen?"

With the moon shining right upon her face, Mary Barber disclosed her reason for saying this, and related her dream, regardless of the wondering stare that Mr. Priar fixed upon her. As she went on, speaking very earnestly, the incredulous surprise on his countenance gave place to a kind of concerned perplexity. Perhaps he was somewhat superstitious himself.

"That's why I asked you, James Priar, whether you had seen him up there. Because in the dream we seemed to know it was the right place to search for him in—somewhere toward the Trailing Indian."

"I've neither seen sign of him, nor heard news of him," was the answer. "If Geoffry Clanwaring tells you he was going to see the sick cow, no doubt that's where he went to."

"But he'd not stay in the cow's shed all this while."

"You don't know. Possibly, he found the animal worse, and may have gone after Cole the farrier. It's not unlikely, Mary."

This idea had not struck Mary Barber. It was certainly possible.

"Yes, yes!" said the surgeon hastily. "For goodness' sake don't let your mind run on those other dismal thoughts. You'll find him all right when you get home."

She slowly shook her head, in spite of the faint hope that arose within her; and they parted. "I might think it," she said, "but for my dream. 'Twas a morning dream: and them morning dreams come true."

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE TRAILING INDIAN.

"Is he come home?" was Mary Barber's first question, as she burst into the farm. And Mrs. Owen caught hold of her as if it were pleasant to find herself again in companionship. The past hour had been worse than solitary.

Robert Owen had not come home. There were no tidings of him within, any more than without. Mary Barber mentioned the suggestion offered by Mr. Priar.

"There's nothing in it, missis, as I believe," she said. "But I'll rouse up Parkes, and make him go with me to the shed. If we see nothing o' the master, we'll come back down the hill to Cole's."

After a considerable amount of shaking and thumping, Mr. Parkes, a thick-headed rustic of twenty, was aroused, and he and Mary Barber started off across the fields. The night was so light that they could distinguish every feature of the way clearly; almost every blade of the sprouting grass.

"I see the master to-night a going on to the shed," suddenly cried Parkes: who had a round crop of red hair, and kept a few steps behind Mary Barber.

She turned her face and her tongue short upon him. "You see the master going on to the shed!" she repeated in a tone of dispute. "What do you mean by that, Parkes?"

"So I did," said Parkes. And he proceeded to explain how it had happened. Parkes had spent the afternoon at his mother's—who lived two or three miles away, on the high road that crossed the upper end of the lane near the Trailing Indian—and came back later than he ought to have come. Jumping over the stile opposite the inn, he crossed the first field to the two-acre meadow. There he suddenly saw his master come round the narrow path between the fence and the grove, just above Harebell Pond. Not caring to be seen—for the rule was that he should be at home earlier—Parkes sheltered himself under the hedge, saw the master strike across the field towards the cow-shed, and then made onwards as fast as his legs would carry him.

"What time was this?" questioned Mary Barber, when she had heard the confession.

"Blest if I can tell a'zactly," replied the young man. "I know 'twere a sight a'ter ten."

Therefore it appeared certain, from this testimony, that Mr. Owen, after parting with Geoffry Clanwaring and Maria, had gone straight on to the cow-shed, through his fields. "But you must have been a fool, not to show yourself and bear him company as you were there, Parkes," cried Mary Barber, who liked nothing better in life than keeping the youth in order.

They passed round the narrow path, so often mentioned, between the grove and the fence—Mr. Parkes taking a temporary recreation by catching up a clod of earth and dropping it over into Harebell Pond. It was the nearest way into the two-acre meadow, cutting off the width of a wide field.

The shed was there, and the cow was there, all right and comfortable: but Robert Owen was not. No sign, even, was seen to tell that he had been: but of course it was not to be expected.

"Let's go and have just a look at the Trailing Indian," cried Mary Barber.

Parkes tramped off after her, over the stile, and across the field to the other stile, opposite the Trailing Indian. All still and quiet lay the house in the moonbeams; closely shut up; there was not so much as a light visible to indicate the chamber of the sick woman told of by Mr. Priar.

"We'll take the way o' the lane back," said Mary Barber, and go on straight to Cole's."

It was just possible her master might have fallen somewhere, she thought, might be lying still, and so escape the eyes of Mr. Priar, who said the lane was empty. *She* kept hers wide open, looking well to the banks on either side: and looking fruitlessly. Parkes flung another clod into the pond as he passed it, bestirring its green and slimy waters. It took more time to knock-up the farrier than it had Geoffrey Clanwarrior. But the man had not seen Mr. Owen.

A more miserable morn than that dawning on Harebell Farm could not well be imagined. Do what she would, bring any confuting argument to bear against the impression, any amount of sober reasoning, Mary Barber was unable to divest herself of the conviction that some untoward fate had overtaken her master, or of the notion that the Trailing Indian and its inmates had something to do with his disappearance. She started off for the inn as early as she thought it would be astir, her footsteps brushing the dew from the grass. The side door of the house was open; she entered without knocking, and penetrated to the kitchen. The kettle was singing away on the sway over the fire; and Mrs. Black, kneeling down before the hearth, was raking the dust from the cinders into the purgatory. A tea-pot and caddy stood on the table.

"Where's my master?" sharply demanded Mary Barber.

Mrs. Black started up as though she had been shot. By the white hue her face changed to, certainly telling of terror, Mary thought the woman must be taking her for an apparition. There was a minute's silence.

"Who did you ask for, please?" then questioned Mrs. Black in her close, meek way.

"I asked for my master: Mr. Owen, of Harebell Farm. That's what I've come for."

"But I don't know anything of him," returned the woman, after a pause, and in what appeared to be very genuine surprise. "He is not here."

"Didn't he come here last night—say at half-after ten, or so?" pursued Mary Barber, hazarding the question.

"Not that I saw; not that I know of. I think the house was shut-up afore that."

"He went to the two-acre meadow about that time, to see a sick cow. We be a thinking that he might ha' come on here: perhaps for something or other that he wanted."

The landlady gave her head a shake, as if hardly understanding. "I'll ask the ostler if you like," she said. "I wasn't about here last night, myself: we've got a sick woman up-stairs."

"I feel as sure in my heart that the master come on here as though I'd seen him come, Mrs. Black."

"Well, he might, in course," admitted Mrs. Black, after a pause given to the consideration of the matter. "I can't say: but Joe'll be here in a minute or two."

Mary Barber sat down without being asked. Mrs. Black finished her cinder job, and pushed the fender into its place.

"Where's Black?" was Mary Barber's next curt question.

"He's not up yet," replied the landlady. "As for me, I've not been to bed."

Mary understood the reason—that she had sat up with the sick woman. "I heard on't," she said. "How is the person?"

"Well, she's bad enough."

A short silence ensued. Mary Barber seemed impatient: the landlady stood waiting for the kettle to boil, and took occasional glances at her morning visitor.

"But I don't understand why it is you've come asking about this," she suddenly observed, the point striking her. "Did Mr. Owen get home tipsy last night?"

"He get home tipsy!" was the indignant rejoinder. "That was never a failing of his. I wish he had though, tipsy or not tipsy. He never come home at all."

Mrs. Black lifted her eyes in surprise.

"Since the time when he went to that there cowshed last night, he has never been seen nor heard of. My belief is that he has been made away with."

The woman was in the act of putting a spoonful of tea into the teapot, as Mary Barber said this. The words seemed to strike her with a shock. Her hands shook so that she spilled the tea; her face again turned ghastly.

"Why, what do you mean?" escaped her trembling lips.

"What I say," sturdily replied Mary Barber. "We have been abroad all night looking for the master, and he's not to be found above ground. I fear he has been murdered."

"Mercy upon us!" cried the woman aghast.

It was evident that if the Trailing Indian (according to Mary Barber's theory) knew anything of Robert Owen's disappearance, its mistress did not. Gathering up the bits of tea from the table and putting them into the pot with her trembling fingers, she was in the act of lifting the boiling kettle off the sway, when the ostler appeared, carrying in two buckets of water from the well.

"This good lady's come round to know if Mr. Owen at the farm called in here last night," she meekly said, speaking in a sort of hurry. And the man gazed out at her with some questioning surprise in his eyes—perhaps at her white lips.

"Owen o' the farm don't never come here," he briefly replied.

"I think he must ha' come last night," interposed Mary Barber, rising to address the ostler. "We've not heard nor seen him since; he never come home."

"He never come here," said the man, stooping to pour the water from one of the buckets into a sort of portable cistern that stood away near a sink. "What time was 't?"

"Nigh upon half-after ten. May be quite that."

"And we was shut up afore ten struck."

"That you warn't," retorted Mary Barber. "Dr. Priar never went away till one o'clock i' the morning."

"The house was shut up afore ten; that I'll swear to," asserted the man. "When Dr. Priar was ready to leave, I unlocked this here side door and let him out myself."

"I told the good lady I thought so—that we was shut up early," spoke the hostess, who had kept her back turned, doing something at the fire.

"We had no callers o' no sort i' the place last night," resumed the ostler, taking up the other bucket. "As to Owen at Harebell Farm, he warn't in the habit o' coming at all. If he'd been here last night, I should ha' seen him."

"Be you sure o' that?" asked Mary Barber.

"I be. I'll take my oath he was not anigh the place."

Mary Barber paused. "Was Black abroad last night?"

"No," replied the ostler, "he never went out at all. He was abed afore we shut up."

Apparently there was nothing to stay for. Mary Barber said good morning and went away, feeling that her errand had been a useless one.

Before the sun was high in the heavens, the news had spread far and

wide : Robert Owen of Harebell Farm had mysteriously disappeared. Hurst Leet put itself into a commotion. The mere fact of his disappearance might not have excited a tenth part of the interest, but for the persistent assertion of Mary Barber, that he had been, in some way, "made away with."

The testimony of Parkes, as to having seen his master on the previous night was confirmed, at least in a negative degree, by two individuals. Joan said that when Parkes got in "late and all out o' breath," he told her he had nearly been "dropped upon" by the master in the two-acre meadow. The other one was Gander, Sir Dene's butler. Gander, returning home soon after ten, overtook Mr. Owen at the entrance to Harebell Lane, gave him the good night, and saw him turn in to his own gate. Therefore, no doubt whatever could rest on any mind that the farmer had proceeded, as was assumed, direct to the shed, on quitting his daughter and her husband. The question now was, what had become of him afterwards.

Harebell Farm, that day, was like a fair. So many sympathising friends and neighbours were flocking up to it. George Arde, who had come over from Worcester on other matters, found it in this commotion. Geoffry Clanwaring was there ; also old Squire Arde. Mary Barber got these three to herself in the best parlour, and there related her dream. The once keen eyes of Squire Arde, watery now, twinkled with merriment as he listened : to use Mary's words, when commenting on it later, he "stared and grinned in her face."

"Mary, woman, I'd not set myself up for a laughing-stock if I was in your place ; the parish might be taking me for a nat'ral. Dreams, indeed !"

But in spite of the old man's ridicule, Mary Barber never wavered an iota in her asserted belief. Her master was *dead*, she said : she knew it by her dream. Dead, or else in some sore stress of plight that would prevent his ever coming back again : she was certain he had seen his home for the last time.

Though not given to be superstitious, her steady assertion in its persistent earnestness made an impression upon the two listeners who may be said to have held the largest interest in the matter, as they were Mr. Owen's sons-in-law : George Arde and Geoffry Clanwaring. They grew to think that he really might be dead. And then they asked themselves and each other, how—if this were so—his death had been accomplished. By accident, or by assault from without ?

"See here," said Squire Arde, looking up from the chair where he sat—"a'most as many accidents happen on a moonlight night as a dark un. People's eyes get deceived by the shadows. I should have the ponds dragged."

"What ponds, sir ?" asked George.

"Eh ? What ponds ? Why, any pond that lay in his way. There's

the one by the fold-yard here ; the duck-pond ; and there's the pond in the lane. Have 'em emptied—or dragged."

"Should you think he could have fallen in, sir?" returned George Arde in what he would have made a tone of mocking incredulity but that he was speaking to the Squire.

"I think he might have walked in," was the answer. "Yes, you young men with your young eyes may stare to hear me say it ; but if you live to Robert Owen's age, you may find 'em cheat you. Did ye ever hear o' one Squire Honeythorn, as lived at Beechhurst Dene?" he quaintly asked. And they smiled at the question.

"Well, one night, moonlight it was too, Honeythorn, in walking home down Harebell Lane, walked right into the pond. He hadn't had a single sup o' drink ; don't you two go a thinking that ; but he was getting in years and the shadows deceived his sight. I know a lady, too, as walked right into the Birmingham canal and thought it was part o' the towing-path. Hardly saved, she was, either ; some boatmen heard her cries as she was sinking. It might ha' gone hard with Honeythorn, only a man on horseback happened to ride down the lane at the time. And that was me."

"If Mr. Owen walked into a pond, it must be the duck-pond here," said George Arde. "He did not go into Harebell Lane."

"How do you know he didn't go?" retorted the Squire.

"We don't *know*, sir, any of us ; but we may judge by probabilities."

"I'd recommend you not to speak so positively, young man. 'Probabilities' have let in older folks than you afore now."

"Well, sir, do you see any likelihood, yourself, of his having gone into the lane?"

"No, I don't," candidly spoke Squire Arde. "I only say he might ha' gone. But there : let Harebell pond be. Try this un."

"I do not fear the ponds," interposed Geoffry Clanwaring, who had been in a deep reverie. "Knowing the ground as Mr. Owen knew it, a bright night besides, it seems next door to an impossibility that any harm of that sort should come to him."

"Master ud no more walk into a pond, whether by daylight or by moonlight, than I should walk into the middle o' that fire!" cried Mary Barber, with a fling of her hand towards the grate. "Squire Arde, it's not *there* we must look for him."

"Where then?" asked the Squire, noting the significance of the tone.

"I think—I think," she slowly rejoined, as if not quite sure, herself—"that it's up at the Trailing Indian. There has been a deal of ill-feeling on Black's part to the master ever since we came to this farm : and I say that if harm has been done to him, it's by the people *there*."

That Black had accused Robert Owen of spying upon him, they were all aware. The neighbourhood knew so much as that. Also that Mr. Owen had emphatically denied any intentional spying on his own part.

He had not looked out for the ill-doings of the Trailing Indian : when they, or a suspicion of them, had come under his notice incidentally, he had not shut his eyes, but kept them open. That was all.

Squire Arde administered a reproof. "Mary Barber, there might ha' been ill-feeling on Randy Black's part to your master ; it's like enough. But you shouldn't go and say the man has murdered him."

"I didn't say it, Squire. I didn't go as far in speech, whatever I might ha' done in thought. Truth is, I don't know what to think," she continued, after a pause, "my brain's all in a muddle o'er it. If no harm has come to the master, where *is* he? I should like to ask Black whether he's alive or dead. When I was up at the Trailing Indian this morning, I couldn't get to see him."

Every little item connected with the past night bore its own individual interest. Geoffry Clanwaring mentioned that as he and his wife were walking home, Mr. Owen told them he had seen two suspicious-looking men stealing up Harebell Lane on the Saturday night, no doubt on their way to the Trailing Indian. Geoffry could have added, had George Arde not been present, that Mr. Owen changed the subject to speak of his daughter Mary—saying he did not think she would be long in this world.

"T would do no harm if some on us went up and had a talk with Black," said Squire Arde. "There has been a sight of trampers and such-like ill-looking folk about lately. If any of 'em set upon Farmer Owen last night in the two-acre meadow, sounds of it might ha' been heard at the Trailing Indian. They've got a habit, them tramps, of creeping into sheds to sleep : may be, Owen found some in his. Let's go."

Nothing loth were the two young men to accompany him to the inn, and they took their hats at once. In the fold-yard stood Gander. Geoffry Clanwaring stopped to accost him.

"You saw Mr. Owen last night, I hear, Gander."

"Yes, sir ; I overtook him i' the lane yonder, as he was turning in at the gate here."

"What passed?"

"Nothing to speak of," was Gander's answer. "I said 'Good night, sir,' to him : 'Good night, butler,' he answered back again. That was all, Mr. Geoffry."

"You did not hear anything of him afterwards?" Geoffry stayed to ask.

"No, sir ; nothing."

"Or see any strange men about?"

"Not a soul, sir."

Black stood in his yard, rubbing up the metal of some harness, when they reached the inn. It may as well be mentioned what was gathered, partly by the man's own admissions, partly by the corroboration of others, of the doings on the Sunday at the Trailing Indian.

In the course of the morning, while people were in church, the man named Robson took his departure, he and Geach having lodged there on the Saturday night. Dinner was served at two o'clock : Black and Geach sitting down to it, Mrs. Black waiting on them. The meal was just finished, when a young woman arrived, a foot-traveller, who asked for Michael Geach and announced herself as his wife. Geach, astounded at the sight, met her with abuse and passion ; while Black, who had not before known there was a Mrs. Geach, abused Geach for letting her come : or, rather, for letting it be known, by her or anybody else, that he might be found at the Trailing Indian. Both the men had partaken plentifully of strong ale at dinner ; it tended to inflame their tempers, and they quarrelled with each other. Quarrelling is thirsty work ; it makes the throat dry ; and the men found it so. They quitted the ale for spirits, and soon got into a state of intoxication. The ostler, in describing it, said they were only " half gone ; " that is, they were not totally unable to talk or walk. During this time, Mrs. Geach fell ill, and was unable to depart, as ordered. What with that fresh annoyance, with the quarrel and the drink, Geach's fury reached its climax. He betook himself off in his passion, mounted a public conveyance that happened to be passing along the highway, and left Mrs. Geach to her fate and the hospitality of the Trailing Indian. That was about five o'clock. Black, after swearing a little at things in general, sat down in the settle before the fire in what was called the parlour, and fell into a heavy sleep. He said that he never awoke from the sleep until Joe, the ostler, was shutting up the inn for the night, just before ten ; and then he went straight up to bed. The ostler said this also ; Mrs. Black said it. Before this, the sick woman grew so ill that Mrs. Black became alarmed, and about eight o'clock dispatched the ostler for Mr. Priar. All agreed in these two important points—that Robert Owen had not been to the inn ; or, so far as they saw, near it : and that none of the inmates of the inn had gone forth from it at all that evening, save the ostler on his errand. He, the ostler, returned to it with Mr. Priar, and did not quit it again. If this statement could be positively verified, it was quite certain that Black could have had nothing to do with the disappearance.

He nodded to the three gentlemen civilly enough when they entered the yard, but kept on rubbing his harness. Frightfully ill, he looked, his complexion a kind of sallow whiteness, the effects probably of the intemperance. It was not often Black yielded to the failing ; when he did, it was sure to pay him off the next day in a racking sick head-ache.

" Well, Black ? " began Squire Arde, " we've come up to have a word or two with you. Do you know anything of Mr. Owen ? "

Black grew suddenly whiter ; with an accession of sickness or of anger. He let the strap fall from his hand, and its buckle clicked against the stable door.

"What I'd like to know, sir, is, why I should be asked it. I'm free to put that question, I suppose," he added, his voice shaking with what seemed concentrated passion. "Here's been folks coming up every hour o' the day since morning light, asking me what I've done with Robert Owen. That woman o' their'n was here afore the house doors was undone. Why should I be bothered about Owen, more nor others?"

"For one thing, you are his nearest neighbour, Black," was the Squire's answer. "For another, the last seen or known of Owen was in the two-acre mead over there, within a stone's throw of you."

"There might be two hundred Owens over in that mead, and me never know it," contended Black.

"Mr. Owen was there—it has been ascertained—at about a quarter past ten last night, or from that to half-past," rather sternly interposed Geoffry Clanwaring. "He has not been seen since. Do you know anything of him, Black?"

"No, I don't, sir," replied Black, speaking with tolerable civility to his landlord's son. "Long afore that time, I was abed. Fact was, I got a drop too much inside me yesterday afternoon—and my head's fit to split, through it, to-day," he added, as if in apology for his sickly face. "I fell asleep in the parlour and never woke nor stirred till bed-time. Joe disturbed me, shutting to the shutters, and I went straight up to bed."

"What time was that?"

"What time?" repeated Black. "Joe knows more sure nor I do," he added. "'Twasn't ten."

"It wanted ten minutes o' ten," interposed Joe, who was splashing away at the horse-trough close by, cleaning it out. "We don't often shut up till ten have struck; but there warn't no customers i' the house nor none likely to come, and I thought I'd close. The master swore at me, saying it warn't time; he was cross at bein' woke up."

"And you swore at him again, I suppose," remarked Squire Arde.

"No I didn't," replied the ostler, in his stolid way. "When a man's in his caps, he's best let alone. He didn't give no opportunity for't, neither; he stumped right off to bed."

"What strikes me's this, Black," said the Squire—who appeared to have quite forgotten the notion of any suspicion against Black. "There's a sight of ill-doing tramps about; always is after a hard winter; if any of 'em had crept into the cow-shed, and Owen found 'em there, he and they might have a row together."

"I've never knowed so many o' them tramps about as now," returned Black, hastily and eagerly. "Two bad uns was at the door on Sunday morning, frightening my missis, and begging for bread. They'd got just the look o' cut-throats."

"Ay," nodded the Squire. "Who knows but them same two laid up

somewhere about here till night, and set on Robert Owen? You might have heard the noise over here."

"I warn't likely to hear nothing," answered Black. "I fell asleep the minute after I got into bed: and when I'm in that stupid state my sleep's heavier nor a top."

At this juncture, Mr. Priar appeared at the side-door, having come down stairs from paying a visit to the sick woman. They remained a few minutes longer talking, Black steadily persisting in his denial of having heard or seen anything of Mr. Owen; and then they all turned to depart, including the doctor.

There's an old and good saying—Let well alone. Black did not allow it to govern him just then. Like many another zealous self-defender, he thought the more words he used, the better his cause might be served.

"I've not had a answer to my question, gentlefolk," he began, arresting them as they were going out. "What I'd like to know is, it there's any cause for *my* being singled out to be badgered about Owen—what's become of him, or what's not?"

Upon that, George Arde, who had been silent hitherto, contenting himself with looking and listening, turned to face the man, and told him of the bitter ill-feeling he was known to have cherished towards Mr. Owen. He spoke with open and rather stinging plainness, of the suspected private ways of the Trailing Indian: not particularising their nature (perhaps he could not) but alluding to them in a general manner, as "ill-doings."

It put up Black's temper. He was under no obligation to Mr. George Arde, or to his relative, the Squire, at his side; and he retorted warmly.

Well, and he had had cause to feel bitter again Owen: though he had never molested him—nor thought o' doing it—nor never had done it. He had got his own proper feelings, he hoped, though he was but a inn-keeper, and the farmer ud never let him alone. Didn't Owen watch him continally?—warn't he a spy upon him—didn't he talk about him at Hurst Leet? *No!* says the gentlemen afore him. *No!* One on 'em, at least, knew better nor that. Look at them lies about the hearse that had stopped to bait at his house that night in the winter. Farmer Owen had set it about that it come to take away a corpse, and had sent Dr. Priar up to accuse him on't. If—

Mr. Priar lifted his arresting hand to command silence. "Don't be so fast, Black. Who told you Mr. Owen sent me?"

"Why, you did," retorted Black—while the ostler stopped his splashing in the trough to listen. "Didn't you confess that the man stood o' purpose at that stile, over there, and watched the hearse away? You know you did, sir."

"I did not," said Mr. Priar. "I told you, Black, that the person

was not watching purposely, but saw it incidentally in passing; I impressed this upon you as plainly as tongue can speak. And I most certainly never told you that the person was Mr. Owen."

"I knew *that* without you telling me, Dr. Priar. There warn't no need to mention names."

"But it was not Mr. Owen."

"Not Mr. Owen! It's all very well for you to try to make me believe that now, sir," added Black with a sneer.

"I tell you truth, Black: it was *not* Mr. Owen. The person who saw you was Jonathan Drew—lying disabled now, poor man. In riding past, he saw the hearse at the open door here, and drew up Dobbin by the stile to watch what came of it."

"I can speak to it's being Drew," interrupted Squire Arde, "for he gave me the history of it the next day from his bed. About the hearse, he talked, and all what he had seen brought out o' the side door here, and shut into it. Don't give your betters the lie to their faces, Randy Black."

Randy Black did not speak. He looked from the curious old man to the doctor, silently asking whether this were really true. So, at least, Mr. Priar interpreted it.

"You need not doubt, Black," said the surgeon. "It was in galloping away from the sight, down Dene Hollow, that Drew's horse threw him—and I wondered often at the time that your own common sense did not show you it could have been no one but Drew; knowing, as you did, that he must have just rode past here. The first thing Drew did when I got him home that night was to tell me what he had seen. He concluded it was your wife that was put into the hearse; so did I. And that's what brought me up on the following morning."

Black's lips parted to speak, and then closed again. In some way or other the narrative was evidently making some great impression on him.

"Drew was mistaken," he burst forth at length. "He never saw it; he couldn't ha' seen what was ne'er there to see. The hearse only stopped to bait; 'twas never opened."

"It is of no consequence now, one way or the other; the thing's past and done with," coolly rejoined Mr. Priar. "Only don't continue to fancy it was Mr. Owen: he saw no more of the matter than I did. As it happens, I am in a position to testify that Mr. Owen never went out of his house that night. I was up there you remember: and we were all in distress about the little child. Mr. George Arde, here, can bear out what I say." And George Arde nodded in confirmation.

"Ay, ay," wound up the Squire. "Don't you be fond o' taking up wrong notions, Black, and then sticking to 'em i' the teeth o' people."

They turned without further speech to quit the yard. Black drew a

long breath as he looked after them. "You can finish the harness, Joe," he said to the ostler: and went indoors.

As they crossed the lane and the opposite stile, Mr. Priar spoke to what had come under his own cognisance the previous evening. It was past eight o'clock, he said, when the ostler, Joe, came to fetch him; they both went back together to the Trailing Indian, reaching it about nine. Black was fast asleep at the corner of the settle: and Joe remarked that his master was "sleeping off some drink." About a quarter before ten Mr. Priar went down stairs for something he wanted: Black was then still asleep in the same place and position, and Joe was sitting by the kitchen fire. After that, Mr. Priar did not see Black again. It was quite possible that the man might have gone up to bed before ten, as he asserted; Mr. Priar could not say one way or the other, for he was shut up with Mrs. Black in the sick woman's chamber. He did not think the ostler went out again: they had occasion to call two or three times for hot water and other things, and the man was always at hand to bring them up. When Mr. Priar came down to leave, an hour after midnight, the ostler was waiting up in the kitchen to let him out. Mr. Priar took half a glass of hot brandy and water before going out, which Joe mixed. He stood by the kitchen fire and talked to Joe while he drank it: and he remembered that the man incidentally mentioned that his master had gone to bed before ten.

All this tended to corroborate Black's own statement: it certainly did appear that he could not have harmed, or helped to harm, Robert Owen. In passing the shed, they turned into it; for curiosity's sake, more than in expectation of making any discovery. Lightfoot, recovering fast, was there, and turned her head to welcome them: but there was no sign that any struggle had taken place in it. In fact the undisturbed litter spoke to the contrary.

"Whatever happened, must have happened *after* he had paid his visit here, there's no doubt of it," remarked Geoffry Clanwaring, as they went out. "Parkes saw him making straight for the shed: had he been molested before reaching it, the man could not well fail to have heard the cries. The door was found fastened too, just as Mr. Owen would leave it. Now then—let us see. He would naturally go straight back home again, knowing Mrs. Owen was waiting up. That would be across here"—stretching out his hand to the two-acre meadow, which lay green and smooth before them as they walked—"round the narrow strip of path, and so across the fields home. It's a pity the sheep are on the other side the farm this year," he added: "had they been here the shepherd might have been about."

Crossing the stile over to the narrow pathway, they traversed it slowly. It was very narrow: not possible for two to walk on it abreast; the fence, a low one, lay on their right as they walked; their left

shoulders brushed the trees. In length it might have been twenty yards ; not more. In the middle of it Squire Arde stopped and looked over at the pond in the lane underneath.

"Ah," said he, "if Owen had been a going through the lane i'stead o' up here, I should say he had mistook his way amid them rushes, and walked into the pond."

"But don't you think, sir, even had such a thing happened, that he would have been able to get out of it again?" spoke Mr. Clanwaring.

"Like enough: some might and others mightn't," answered the old man. "What's this?"

He had his back against the fence now, glancing at the brushwood that grew amidst the tree-trunks immediately in front of where he stood. It appeared to be a little torn.

"One might a'most fancy that somebody has made a dash through it just here. What d'ye think.

The three others, glancing to where the old man pointed, did not appear to think much about it. "Some animal, perhaps," one of them carelessly answered.

"I suppose we must give up all suspicion of Black," remarked Geoffry Clanwaring, as they went on over the open field. "The account he gives seems fair enough. Likely to be true."

"Ay: I don't doubt him in this, for my part," acquiesced the Squire.

"Neither do I," said Mr. Priar.

"I don't altogether doubt him; but I don't altogether trust him," dissented George Arde. "Look here: while you were talking to him, I was watching him: taking observations, as may be said. There was one thing I did not like—his enlarging on the state he was in yesterday. It is not considered a great crime to get drunk in these drinking days; nevertheless, most men would rather hide the fact than gratuitously proclaim it. I wondered whether he had any motive for wishing us fully to believe that he *was* drunk. Another thing: he never while he spoke, looked one of us in the face throughout the whole interview."

Squire Arde, deep in his own thoughts, had not been listening. "Who didn't?" he sharply asked, waking up.

"Who, sir!" returned George Arde, slightly surprised. "I was speaking of Randy Black."

CHAPTER XIII.

HAREBELL POND.

THE singular disappearance of Robert Owen excited more speculation and comment than anything that had occurred in the neighbourhood of late years. The turning out of doors and razing the home of the widow

Barber, the stolen marriage of Sir Dene's son, both of note at the time of their occurrence, did not excite the prolonged commotion that this disappearance caused. As the days went on and brought no tidings, the painful interest increased. He was not a man likely to have gone away of his own accord; and yet he could not be heard of above ground. Mary Barber's opinion, that he had been put under it, spread silently.

The duck-pond near the fold-yard was searched; it yielded in recompense nothing but mud. In returning home from his visit to the shed (if he did return), Mr. Owen might pass the brink of this pond. The probability was that he would; though he could have gone round on the other side the barn. Harebell pond was let alone: it was universally assumed that nothing would be likely to take Mr. Owen into the lane. To have returned home that way, after leaving the shed, he must have traversed the outer field, crossed the stile opposite the Trailing Indian, and thence through the whole of the lane—a regular round for nothing. So Harebell pond was not meddled with.

The feeling against the Trailing Indian died away. Mary Barber avowed *her* doubts of it openly enough, and this at first raised somewhat of doubt in the minds of others: but as there was absolutely nothing to corroborate these doubts—nay, as the Trailing Indian seemed, for that one evening at least, to be beyond the pale of suspicion, the thought of connecting Black with the disappearance faded away, so far as regarded the public. Mary Barber, however, do as she would, could not get rid of her fear so easily; it clung to her in spite of herself, and perhaps influenced in a degree some of those about her.

Sir Dene Clanwaring, waiving prejudices for the time being, made a call at Harebell Farm. Never, since his son's marriage with Maria, had he exchanged a word with Robert Owen, or condescended to notice him by so much as a nod in passing. He did not accuse the farmer of having in any way helped on the marriage, or of being privy to it; but his wounded pride would not brook the slightest approach to intercourse. In his interest now; his curiosity, and perhaps also in a better feeling—that of compassion for Mrs. Owen—he considered it his duty as landlord to call. Mrs. Owen, however, was keeping her room, too ill to receive him; but he saw the son, who had been summoned home in the distress. William Owen was the eldest of the family; a slight, quiet young man, of three-and-twenty, very much like his mother. He was with a farmer in Wiltshire, gaining experience, and earning a small salary. Harebell Farm had been no larger than Mr. Owen could himself well manage; and the son was waiting until his father could spare the funds to take a small farm for him. Sir Dene was a little taken with the young man, whose manners were very gentle and pleasing. Sir Dene questioned Mary Barber what her grounds had been for doubting Black—of which doubt he had heard from his son

Geoffry : and Mary Barber, nothing loth, regaled Sir Dene's ears with her singular dream. Sir Dene did not attempt to dispute the dream, or to cast ridicule upon it : he simply asked, when the relation was over, *what* there was in that dream to cause her to suspect Black. She replied that the only part of the dream which could have had any reference to Black, was the concluding part of it—when they were searching for Mr. Owen in their distress, and were all making, as if by instinct, towards the direction of the Trailing Indian—and that it was *not* the dream which led her mind to doubt Black, but the ill-feeling which the man, as was well-known, had long entertained towards her master. Sir Dene nodded acquiescence to this, and took his leave courteously. Since the finding of the paper given by Squire Honeythorn, he had been very civil to Mary Barber when by chance they met : as if he would tacitly apologise for having doubted her mother's word.

The weather in England is capricious ; as we too well know. Before the Easter week was quite out, the lovely spring sunshine had given place to a heavy fall of snow. One day when the ground was white Sir Dene and his son Geoffry were returning home on foot through Harebell Lane from a visit to some outlying land on the estate, and caught the sound of some young voices in dispute, as they approached the pond. Suddenly a man's tones drowned the others'.

"What's the matter there, I wonder?" carelessly remarked Sir Dene to his son. "That's Black's voice."

The matter was this. Two little plough-boys, not quite so hard-worked as usual by reason of the snow, had met in Harebell Lane, and went in for a game of snow-balling. It ended in roughness. There was a personal tussle on the edge of the pond, and both fell amid the snow and rushes. Fell on something that hurt the under one. It proved to be a thick, nobbly, walking-stick, polished to the brightness of mahogany. Both lads seized upon it, each claiming it for his own booty. While they were fighting for possession, Randy Black came up the lane, pounced upon the combatants, like the hawk in the fable, and took the stick. As Sir Dene came in sight he was holding it above his head, beyond the reach of the howling and indignant boys, who were vainly jumping up to try and get it back. Black had his back turned, and did not see that any one was near.

"What stick's that?"

The stern, authoritative interruption was Geoffry Clanwaring's. It arrested the boys' noise, it startled Black. As the man turned sharply to see who spoke it, he flung the stick into the pond—and Geoffry, springing forward, was too late to save it.

"What did you do that for, Black?" demanded Geoffry.

"It's the best place for it, Mr. Clanwaring," was Black's answer, as he made a show of touching his hat to Sir Dene. "These here young devils 'ud a fought to their skins for't else."

"It is *not* the best place for it," returned Geoffry, with some emotion. "Wait an instant, sir, please," he added to his father, who was walking on. "Whence did you get that stick, Black?"

Something seemed to be the matter with Black. He had turned so deadly white.

"What stick was't?" he questioned of the boys, moving to face them. "These here young hounds had ha' got fighting over it when I come up."

"'Twere 'mong the rushes," sobbed one. "'Twere me as it hurted, a falling on't; 'twere me as had it first."

"Why do you inquire, Geoffry?" asked his father. "Is the stick anything to you?"

"Yes, sir. The stick was Mr. Owen's. It was the one he had with him that night."

"Nonsense!" cried Sir Dene in his surprise. "Mr. Owen's!"

"I am sure of it. As Black held it up, I saw it distinctly, and recognized it. What was your motive for throwing it into the pond?" he asked, turning on Black.

"Motive! I'd got no motive, sir—but to pay out these here two varmints," was Black's ready answer. "Why don't ye tell about the stick, and where ye got it?" he savagely added to the two young culprits, boxing one, and kicking the other. "Not as I should think 'twas any stick o' Owen's. 'Taint likely."

"I tell you it *was*," said Geoffry, with a touch of his elder brother's hauteur. "How dare you dispute my word?"

"If you think 'twas, sir, I'm sure I be sorry to have pitched it in," said Black humbly. "I never thought 'twas anything o' consequence: and I don't think it now. As to you two young beasts, I hope you'll come to be hung, for getting me into this row."

He touched his hat again and went on towards the Trailing Indian. Geoffry Clanwaring looked after him.

"Father, I do believe that man knows more about the past than he ought. He pitched in that stick in terror—to hide it. So it seemed to me."

"Owen's stick!" cried Sir Dene, unable to realize the fact. "What is to be done, Geoffry?"

"We must have the pond searched, sir. If the stick was really lying amid the rushes on its brink, the probability is that he is lying within it."

Sir Dene recognized the necessity for action; and no time was lost. In the presence of quite half the population of Hurst Leet, who flocked up to see the sight, Harebell pond was searched. The stick was first of all fished up, and then its master.

Just as he had gone out of his home that night; in his great coat, his magpie cap tied on over his ears, apparently untouched, not a fold

of his garments ruffled, so he was found. At first it was supposed that it was a simple case of accidental drowning. But soon the discovery was made that he had been injured—apparently by a blow—in the back of his head. Was that blow accidental?—or wilful?

Squire Arde, making one of the throng, and whose opinion from his age and position had long held sway in the place, thought Robert Owen had fallen into the pond from above.

"When he left the cow-shed that night, he might have halted at the fence to look up and down the lane, have leaned too far over it and overbalanced himself; his head struck again some sharp substance in the pond, which stunned him, and so he lay and was drowned. As to the stick, it fell amid the rushes, and was hid. Or else," added Squire Arde, "some villain struck at him from behind as he was standing above there, stunned him, and hurled him over. 'Twas one or 'tother, I think. D'ye mind what I said 'tother day, Mr. Geoffrey Clanwaring—about the brushwood being disturbed up there?"

The public took up the notion from that hour: Robert Owen, either by accident or assault, fell over the fence into the water, and lay there quietly to drown. There was no proof at all: only supposition. The coroner's inquest was assembled, and brought in an open verdict: Found dead in Harebell pond.

And that was the ending of Robert Owen in this world. The ill-fated man was buried in the churchyard at Hurst Leet, a crowd of spectators attending the funeral.

One piece of impudence must be mentioned. On the day following the interment, Randy Black presented himself at Beechhurst, and craved an audience of its master. He had come to ask for the lease of Harebell Farm, and offered (as an inducement) to pay the first year's rent in advance. Sir Dene thought it the coolest piece of impudence he had ever met with; and very nearly (in wish at any rate) kicked Mr. Randy out of the house. Harebell Farm, he said, was not in the market.

That was true. It had been arranged that William Owen should manage the farm in his late father's place; and Sir Dene had already accepted him as tenant.

A week or two went slowly on. The inclement snow, the biting winds again gave place, in accordance with their capricious fashion, to genial spring weather and bright sunshine. But, long ere a month had elapsed, a very startling and disagreeable rumour arose in the place—it was not quite certain whence, or how. The substance of it was that Robert Owen could not rest in his grave, but came back again to haunt the earth. It was said that he had been seen more than once hovering about Harebell Lane.

After the rumour had been whispered well about, the first person to see the apparition—or to fancy he saw it—was Sir Dene's butler,

Gander. One moonlight night towards the end of April, just about four weeks after that other moonlight time, which had witnessed the disappearance of Robert Owen, Gander went up on an errand to the Trailing Indian, sent thither by his master. Sir Dene happened to be out of tobacco : none, for miles round, was to be had so good as that kept at the Trailing Indian, and even Sir Dene did not disdain to avail himself of that ill-reputed house's goods. "Get a pound of it, Gander," said he : "and as much more as Black will spare."

Gander got the tobacco, paid for it, and accepted a glass of ale, hospitably proffered by Black. Like his master, he could forget the doubtful reputation of inn and host, when his interest was concerned—and Gander knew what good ale was as well as anybody. "To drink it up at a gulp and bolt, ud be fine manners," thought the butler. So he sat down and sipped it, and had a chat with Black.

"How's that there young woman as was ill here?" he asked.

"She's not about yet," answered Black angrily, for the matter had annoyed him from the first. "Got a bad leg, or something."

After sitting about a quarter of an hour, Gander started for home at a quick pace, the paper of tobacco in his hand. "That's a rare good tap, up at Black's," he said to himself as he went along the lane. "Wish Sir Dene ud keep as good a one for us!"

In approaching the pond, he got thinking of him who had, not so long ago, been found there ; which was but natural ; and the association of ideas caused him to glance up at the fence above. And if ever a man felt that he was struck into stone, Gander did then.

For there, leaning over the fence and staring at him—just as he might have leaned the night of his death—was the well-known form of Robert Owen.

"Mercy be good to me!" gasped the butler.

Dropping the paper of tobacco, never stopping to pick it up, Gander sprung off with a yell that might have been heard at the Trailing Indian, and never drew breath or step till he burst into the servants' hall at Beechhurst Dene.

(To be continued.)



GOING OUT TO THE DIAMOND FIELDS.

SOMEWHERE about twenty years ago, the sober equanimity of this country of ours was broken in upon by the wonderful news of gold being discovered in so great an abundance in Australia that it might be gathered up in basketfuls. An exodus to that far-off land at once set in. Old men and young ones threw up home, friends, occupation here, and hastened to take ship. They went out by shoals: fever had seized on their veins, and no argument could cool it. The more they went, the more, it seemed, remained to go: the cry, over there, was *They come, and still they come*. Without giving a thought to the weighty question of whether they were fit or unfit for the hard and laborious life on which they would enter, or the climate that they, with their sheltered habits, might find unbearable, away they sailed, ship-load after ship-load. By far the greater portion of them went out to encounter disappointment, privation, misery, poverty; and a vast many, death. *As the proportion of one to a hundred, was the successful digger to the non-successful.* In time the real state of things became pretty accurately known here: but we never knew, and never could, or did, picture a tithe of the astounding distress. Australia teemed with it. The years, flowing on since in their course, two decades of them, served to obliterate these things from the public memory: a new generation has grown up who know nothing of them.

Just as those gold-fields took the world by storm then, turning it, as may be said, upside down, the reports of the newly discovered diamond fields in Africa have taken it now. The same rush to pick up these diamonds is setting-in; the same glowing tales of thousands of pounds to be realized in a morning's gathering regale the eager eye and ear. As a child is led away by the fascination of a fairy-tale, fully believing in its reality, so are men being deluded by these dazzling fables. People talk to one another in wild credulity of the golden harvest that is lying yonder, ripe and ready to be reaped.

If those who go out to swell the crowds of gleaners were suitable for the task, physically and relatively, not much might be said. The exact contrary is the case. Young fellows—old ones too, for that matter—whose strength has never been exercised, or energy tried; who have never seen or done a day's hard work in their lives; never tested their capability of endurance to bear all kinds of ill and bodily discomfort—and therefore probably possess it not—are throwing up their occupations as clerks, or what not, to go out and pick up diamonds. Gentlemen who have never soiled their hands, and idle loafers who won't work at home,

are alike following the stream. For the industrious man in good employment to resign a certainty for an uncertainty, is as nothing. Non-success is not so much as glanced at. The El Dorado of their new dreams is there : they think they have but to get to it.

How many of the first arrivals, the vanguard of those who are following, have already found out their bitter mistake, is not yet known. That some have, is an ascertained fact : but who heeds it ? " I am going out to the Cape to get diamonds ; sail next week," said a good fellow, steady as Old Time, on Christmas Eve last. " And your post here : what of that ?" was the answering question. " Oh, I have resigned it. I shall make as much in a week, with luck, as that's worth to me by the year." With luck ! His salary was three hundred pounds : he had a prospect of rising. " I am going with him," added a lad by his side, wanting a year to be out of his teens. " My mother comes down crying in a morning, says she's had no sleep : that she fears I shall only go to the bad, or die. Mothers are so silly, you know. As if it were not a glorious prospect, to make as much money at once as will set one up for life !" They have both gone out, despite of remonstrances and entreaties : at this moment of writing are most probably beating about the Bay of Biscay, as sick as they can be, for there's a gale blowing seaward. Well for them if they should not get sick later in a different way. A hard journey of hundreds of miles over a dreadful country ; continued toil ; a burning climate part of the year ; sand that blinds ; fever, ague, dysentery ; rough and reckless companions ; drinking, gambling—these and other evils lie in their way : well indeed for them if they shall come out of all unscathed ! Of the numbers who are flocking out in jaunty spirits, what proportion are really fitted to encounter the hardships they must inevitably meet, or possess the moral firmness to resist the temptations to evil that will surround them ?

Success is a lottery, take it at its best. One prize to rounds and rounds of blanks. A very few may get enough diamonds to repay their labour, and come home to enjoy the fruits : they will be but the units in the thousands. How many will return beggars, broken in health, demoralized in heart, to begin life again here, and earn a difficult living, only the future can show : how many more will not be heard of again, but will stay out there and die in lonely exile, will never be known. It is but the few who are suited to go out : whose plans are well organized, who have strength to work, energy to persevere, and courage to bear. These, the exceptions, have a fair expectation of success, and do well to try it. They throw up, perhaps, no good prospects at home ; they have no near ties to run from : let them depart with a brave heart, for they may find their diamonds. But the others ; the unsuitable—what is to be said of them, what will be their future ? Oh, that they could see beforehand, the panorama of that life they enter on !

During the time that the rush to Australia for gold was at fever-heat, a narrative of how one man prospered who went there (flinging up a valuable situation at home, quitting wife and children) was allowed to appear in a first-class periodical of the day; sent to it in the hope that it might serve as a warning to others, who were about to embark on the same folly. It has been deemed well to reprint that paper now. And if the record of Mr. Ashton's experience, of his sufferings and disappointment, of the bitter mistake he made, shall only serve to open the eyes of one of these later would-be diamond seekers—to induce him to halt on the threshold of his departure and ask himself what it is that he is about to do, what unknown trials he may be entering on, and whether he has within him the requisite mental and physical endurance to bear—it will have earned its reward.

A RECORD OF THE GOLD-FEVER.

It was in the early part of December 1851, that a family party had gathered round a well-spread dessert-table, in a handsome house in one of the southern suburbs of London. Mr. Ashton, a fine man in his sixty-fourth year, keen-looking and agreeable, with snow-white hair, sits at its head, the master. He had entered a great city warehouse in early life, and risen in it by degrees to a small junior partnership, at length retiring on a handsome competency. His wife is by his side: a rheumatic affection of the hands prevents her from carving; and her eldest son sits in her place at the table's other end.

Look at that son: Willoughby Ashton. A handsome man of five-and-thirty, tall and slender, with both intellect and intelligence marked in the lines of his face: but there is a want of physical strength in his appearance, causing a suspicion of delicacy of constitution. He is in that same old mercantile house, and already enjoying his six hundred per annum. His wife is present: a very pretty woman. It is Mrs. Ashton's birthday; she is two-and-sixty; and the whole family have assembled, according to custom: married daughters and sons, with their husbands and wives.

"What do you think?" cries the old gentleman, winking at his sons-in-law, as he holds a glass of rich port wine between his eye and the light, "Willoughby has been stricken with the gold-fever."

"No!" utters one.

"Fact," returns Mr. Ashton. "Talks of throwing up his place, and freighting a vessel out there: that he may make sure, you know, of having space to stow away his riches home again."

"I should like to see Willoughby with a pickaxe and shovel, digging away up to his middle in water!"

"Willoughby, my dear," exclaims the old lady—Willoughby had been her family name—"you'll be dead in two months if you take to live in the water!" Like the rest, she treats the affair as a joke.

"Will he wear his primrose gloves out there?" calls out his sister, Mrs. Todd.

"Oh, of course! he'll dig in them," adds the other, Mrs. Ducie. "Are you going too, Clara?"

"Not I," laughingly replies Mrs. Willoughby Ashton. "He gallantly told me that I should be nothing out there but a trouble and an encumbrance."

"I should not go for pleasure, Clara," cries out Mr. Willoughby Ashton, with a dash of reproach in his eye.

"Not a bit of it," breaks in the old gentleman: "you'll go for pain, Will."

A hearty laugh follows, in the midst of which Mr. Willoughby speaks again. "You know Turnbull?" he asks of the others.

"Turnbull, of Threadneedle-street. Well?"

"He's going."

"I don't believe it," says one of the young Ashtons, bluntly. "Turnbull is too wide awake to be such a fool."

"Turnbull is going!" returns Mr. Willoughby, emphatically. "He is making preparations now."

"And what is he going to do with his business?"

"Oh, he is giving that all up. Selling off."

"Then he *is* a fool!" exclaims the young gentleman.

"So you may think," retorts Mr. Willoughby. "If you find him come back in a couple of years with fifty or a hundred thousand pounds in his pocket, who'll call him a fool then?"

"Let me fill your glass, my dear," says Mr. Ashton to his wife, "and yours, Clara: fill all your glasses, children. We will drink success to Willoughby's voyage—if he goes. A safe voyage out, and a sure one home again! Of course, Clara, he'll sell off you and the children before he starts: not to be hampered with remembrance of encumbrances, you know: as selling off seems to be the order of the day!"

So the jokes went round. And not one, of all that were seated round that dinner-table, had an idea, save Willoughby Ashton himself, how deeply this popular fever was taking root in his heart.

Not many days afterwards, he and his father were closeted together, the latter's features expressing the most unbounded astonishment and dismay, as he listened to his son's assertion that he had irrevocably made up his mind to go and try his luck at the gold-fields.

"Willoughby, you are mad!" exclaimed the elder man. "You must be mad! You are already in the enjoyment of six hundred a year, with the certainty of an increase, doubtless of a partnership; what can you want more?"

Mr. Willoughby drew himself up. What was a paltry six hundred a year to the unbounded wealth of the gold-fields?

"A needy man, without prospects at home," proceeded Mr. Ashton, "might be justified in going to the other part of the world on speculation——"

"Speculation!" retorted Willoughby, more contemptuously than perhaps he had ever spoken to his father, "as if you could name *speculation* and the gold regions together!"

Mr. Ashton continued to remonstrate, without taking note of the interruption. "Or one who could go there without forfeiting his family's means of living, might try the experiment, but not *you*!"

"I shall realise a splendid fortune out there," returned the son: "everybody does, that goes. And come back in a year or two and enjoy it, and be at my ease for life."

"You may realise nothing," replied Mr. Ashton, warmly. "You may not even live to come back. The existence there is reported to be fearfully hard."

"Oh, hard or soft, what's that to a strong man?" cried Mr. Willoughby, slightly. "A little discomfort's nothing. Why, sir, it would be a positive sin for the father of a young family not to go where gold is to be picked up for the stooping! All our efforts, society's efforts, are exerted for the acquisition of money, and if an opportunity be presented to us of obtaining as much, during a period of a few months, as we have hitherto done in a lifetime, it is our duty to take advantage of it."

"You must first convince me that these fortunes are really to be picked up," returned Mr. Ashton. "You would do well, Willoughby, to remember the old proverb, 'All's not gold that glitters.'"

"They are being picked up daily!" asserted the younger man. And there was not a shade of relenting in his tone.

No relenting then, or afterwards. Father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, children—all were turned a deaf ear to by Willoughby Ashton. Some of them he partially gained over to his way of thinking, his wife especially. He quite believed, himself, and at length convinced her, that he was acting for the best for her and the children; and that their separation would hold but a short space in the duration of their lives, when he should come home laden with gold. Had an angel come down from heaven to show Willoughby Ashton that his hopes might turn out fallacious, he had never listened, for the fever-thirst was strong upon him. The youngest son, John, caught the infection outright, and was wild to accompany his brother; but the old gentleman interposed his veto, and Mr. John was not his own master yet. So he cooled himself with a few unfilial bursts of expletives, when out of his father's hearing, and a solemn, volunteered assurance to everybody he came near, that he should start off, on his own account, the instant he could hoard up cash enough.

So Mr. Willoughby Ashton resigned his lucrative post in the powerful

mercantile house of Makemoney, Keepit, and Co., and in the month of March, 1852, away he started for Melbourne.

The following are extracts from his Diary. They are extremely disjointed; but want of space requires them to be so.

At Sea, June 29.—We shall soon be nearing the end of our voyage. All's well, thank God! The discomforts in various ways have been excessive; but I made up my mind before leaving England, to *put up* with such. These Australian vessels, however, must be very differently managed before they will receive the approbation of the emigrating public. We have been stowed something like sheep in a pen. The gold had need to be abundant to satisfy these crowds of diggers. Some of my fellow-passengers laugh at me for having brought out such a quantity of tools and other articles and say I shall be glad to dispose of them for an old song before I reach the diggings. It would have been a bad spec, it seems, had I persisted in bringing out miners: by all accounts, they would only have deserted, leaving me my trouble and expense for nothing. My father's advice was good there.

Melbourne, July 10.—Three days arrived. A most prosperous passage, so far as weather's concerned, of four months. Delivered my letters of introduction, and got all the information I could. They told me truth on board. Of the many expensive articles I brought out, spending the hard cash that would be of use to me now, not ten per cent. of the whole lot will be of any avail. It would take a fortune to transport them to the diggings, at the prices charged for conveyance; so I shall dispose of them in the best way I can, and start without encumbrance. "You must give them away, or next to it," they said to me at the Melbourne Bank to-day. And from the piles of emigrants' things lying where we landed, for which no purchasers can be found, it would seem they are right.

What a place this Melbourne is! Its contrasts are appalling. Emigrants from England, whose scanty stock of money was speedily exhausted by the absurd prices charged for landing and for necessities, are encamped outside the town under wretched tents, being alike unable to get to the diggings, or to pay for decent accommodation here. There must be some thousands so encamped. Canvas Town, it is called; an appropriate name. I looked into one of these tents to-day, and found in its inhabitants, to my surprise, English gentlepeople!—a stupid surprise, and one that will wear off with every hour of my Melbourne life. Their name is C——n. Things went down with them at home, and they resolved to emigrate, reaching here two months ago. They knew the W——s and the R——s, friends of Makemoney's. More careworn sorrow I never wish to see than was imprinted in the lady's face—for she evidently is a lady, in spite of the wretched way that she has to live in now. The husband told me he had procured a situation in a store, where he earns 4*l.* per week. "And that does not go so far," said Mrs.

C., "as 1*l.* would in London. We are obliged to live in this miserable tent—and look what a place it is for my poor little children! For two bare rooms they ask 2*l.* 8*s.* per week. Water alone is a fearful price. Oh, that we were at home again!" I turned away, thanking my stars that I had overruled Clara's wish of coming. In the afternoon, I took them up two or three copies of the *Times*, a welcome offering here.

But now for the contrast. Crowds of successful diggers, who have got rich (for the time) at the diggings, are down here on the spree, spending it. Tearing up and down the streets in any vehicle that can be hired for gold: drinking champagne cut of bottles, smoking short pipes, singing and swearing. And the dresses of their female companions! amber satin, scarlet ribbons, white feathers. The horses and carriages are decked out with streamers, wheels and all; the driver looks like a Merry-Andrew, a mass of ribbons of various colours from head to foot. They are living upon the fat of the land, and squandering their gold on every heard-of and unheard-of folly. "So much the better!" called out one of them to me to-day; "when it's gone we shall go back and find more. That's the fun of it!" Mr. H—e, standing by, laughed. "They have had a good haul of success," said he.

July 31.—THE DIGGINGS!!!—The golden spot is reached at last! Here we are, at Mount Alexander!—the expedition is accomplished. And now to reap its fruits!

I have chosen a mate. I picked the fellow up on my way—a swarthy, big-limbed Hercules, not over refined; but he'll work the better for that. His name's Cole. It is a singular scene here: and from the shoals of diggers congregated on it, one might think that not a single spot of its rich earth can be yet intact. This is a glorious country; the scenery in many parts is charming, and the vegetation luxuriant. A buoyancy of spirit comes over me, like unto that of my early youth: the effect of the climate they tell me. It's something new, to say the least of it, this life, as experienced in the journey from Melbourne; fatiguing, but novel. Climbing over mountains, and trailing through tangled brushwood; watching by turns at night, and feeding the fire; sleeping, sometimes under torrents of rain, with hand to pistol, amidst all sorts of animals, hitherto foreign, for bedfellows, frogs preponderating; washing in the morning in the cleanest puddle to be found, drying upon nothing, except one's shirt; and living upon half allowance, lest the biscuit should not hold out! A man of delicate stomach will heave it out if he comes here: if he can't get his meat hot from the killing, he must eat it when it will walk down his throat of its own accord.

Oh for an artist's pencil to portray the scene, as it stretches out now before my sight! None of the, so called, representations or drawings, circulating in England, bear the faintest resemblance to it. I ask some men if they are succeeding: they answer, Yes; others cry, No; but all

seem to agree in one thing—that it is a regular lottery. We begin work to-morrow, and then !—and then !

October 10.—No success as yet. I am sick of recording the same thing. How many more holes, I wonder, shall we try with the like result? After one has dug no end of feet and is looking narrowly for a sign of the precious metal, up rushes the water from some underground spring, and out one has to scamper and abandon it. By Jove ! it's comforting, that, after all the labour ! Or else, one digs and digs and digs, the mischief knows how deep, and then comes the discovery that the hole's worthless. Comforting again !

My mate's a rough sort of customer, but not bad on the whole. He works hard : as we all have to do. What laborious toil it is ! The stooping is enough to break one's back ; some evenings we feel as if we should never be upright again. The strokes of the pickaxe shake every muscle of the body : the hands are in blistered wounds, so that the handles of the axe are sometimes streaming with blood. Nice hands to do our washing with at night, and our cooking ! *Let no one come out here who does not know that he is able to bear the very extremity of discomfort and physical pain ;* for, if he cannot, he will feel inclined, when he gets here, to stretch himself down in despair and die. The flies and the dust are awful ; our eyes are dreadfully affected with them ; the agony excruciating ; mine are partially better now, but the pain still such that I should lie up for it, in England. The mosquitoes abound in swarms, and bite like furies.

November 17.—Nothing to brag of still. We are getting about enough to pay for the licence, *not* our expenses. Commenced another hole to-day. Some, close to us, are doing capitally. I saw one nugget turned up yesterday—such a size ! It will be our turn next : and when I shall have hoarded a fortune, what joy to get home again to civilized life ! I was about to write “refined,” but it may be as well not to think about refinement just now. We keep armed to the teeth, especially at night and going to and from work, such a fearful set of ruffians are mixed up amongst us. Dogs abound in the camp : some of them, savage animals. It is no unusual occurrence for an unfortunate wight, benighted in his search after provisions or other matters, to be attacked and torn by them. The climate, so far as I can judge as yet, is bad. Raging hot winds, bringing clouds of dust ; burning days—many a one dies from a sunstroke ; fearfully cold mornings and evenings, and damp nights. Flies are swarming around me now as I write : mouth, nose, ears, they get in everywhere ; and the torment to the eyes is—not agreeable. Men are continually dying off from drunkenness, many from dysentery, some from fever ; some literally from the hardships of their life. There is no registry or anything of the sort kept here, so that none, away from the spot, can tell who dies and who lives.

I write in the highest spirits to Clara, and paint things in different

hues from the reality. To do so is a general practice here—at least, with those in my own class of life. Why give our families needless anxiety? they have enough as it is. I have told Clara the truth about my hitherto non-success; for to raise false hopes in that way would be wrong. Ah! it is a different life from what I led at home. There we should call it a dreadful life; a life to be shuddered at and shrunk from. We can but feel it. However much we may affect to be brave, and despise it, there's not one of us but rebels at it in his heart of hearts.

Christmas Day, 1852.—Many happy returns of the season to my dear home, and to all friends in old England! I don't know how it is with my fellow exiles, but I cannot speak of our own land, without a rising in the throat. May her sons, as a whole, never know what it is to be banished as we are! They would laugh at home if they could see us at the moment of our receiving letters from England. We are like a school boy over his first love epistles, and are not ashamed to hug them to our waistcoats before opening. A fresh newspaper, of six months' date, is an event to be told through the camp; and the assemblage attracted in the evening to the hut of the fortunate possessor, after work is over, listening to its pages in rapt attention, is worthy the pencil of a Wilkie or Hogarth. Never shall I hereafter see a newspaper, even in the future years of home, when they shall have ceased to be of such value to me, without a silent blessing on their inventor; for the boon they confer on all who are exiled as I am now, can never be conceived, save by those that have experienced it.

We have had better success, and are now paying our expenses; but little more. I was laid up all last week with an attack of rheumatism: and what wonder, when the rain sometimes pours in upon us in our sleep? And when it does come, it's not in torrents, but in buckets-ful. It's trying work, too, standing all day up to our waists in water, as some of us have to do.

II.

THE time went round for England as well as for Australia. Willoughby Ashton's friends were extremely anxious about him; his wife particularly; and there were hundreds of deserted wives in England who could echo the anxiety. Sometimes a rush of expectant hope would animate Clara Ashton's heart as she pictured the time of his return in high health and spirits, looking just as he did when he departed, and bringing gold to make them rich for life. But this state of mind was the exception: she more generally thought of him, perhaps ill, perhaps dead, perhaps *faithless*. All kinds of strange stories came home from the diggings, none of them too comforting; and they naturally troubled her as much as they did others. She would picture her husband lying in a rude tent, no comforts, no friends about him, his eyes glaring with

delirium, his lips parched with fever, vainly calling upon *her* name to bring him a cup of cooling water. Anon the vision would change, and she saw him, forgetful of home habits and the ties of Christian and social life, yield to the persuasions of his debased associates, and making one in their wild orgies. Her dreams were generally of him. Sometimes he was represented as hopelessly toiling; once, she saw him winding over never-ending mountains, that extended beyond the world into unknown and fearful regions; a weary way it was: but he must push on, on, it seemed for ever, faint and weary, like the wandering Jew. Once there came a dream of his being home again, and they were rejoicing together in their happiness. To awake from that last dream was perhaps the most painful of all, from its contrast to reality.

The day they were in the habit of celebrating, Mrs. Ashton's birthday, came round. The first guest to arrive was Clara; who went into the sitting-room with the lightest step she had known for months. No one was there but Mrs. Ashton; and when Mr. Ashton afterwards entered, he found his wife in tears and Clara's eyes red.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"We will tell *you*!" answered Mrs. Willoughby, with a most radiant look of joy, in spite of her red eyes; "but we have agreed not to let the others know until after dinner, and then bring it out as a surprise."

"You have heard from Willoughby!" exclaimed the old gentleman. And the deep, sudden flush upon his own face, the anxious look of expectation, proved how precious to him was the remembrance of his son.

"I heard this morning," she said. "He is so well! He had the most prosperous voyage!" And she went on to tell of it.

"But what about the diggings?" interrupted Mr. Ashton. "Is he making his fortune?"

"He had not reached the diggings when he wrote; he was at Melbourne. There must be letters for you all on the road, for he says he has written. Oh, I am so happy! Everything with him seems to be well and prosperous."

Willoughby Ashton was right, in regard to his wife's peace of mind, when he determined to suppress the most painful features of his new life.

"It is a very strange thing we don't hear from Willoughby!" exclaimed one of the young Ashtons, after dinner. "There's another mail in."

Clara looked up and hesitated. Her blushing cheeks and sparkling eyes told the tale.

"You have heard!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducie, reproachfully. "And not to tell us!"

The letter was produced now: the greatest treasure that could be laid on that dessert-table.

"Come here, you little rascal," said Mr. Ashton, drawing towards him a fine lad of seven years old, from the side of his mother. "You shall drink your father's health with us, and a safe voyage home again."

The child, it was Willoughby's eldest son, took the glass his grandfather handed him. But though he listened to what he was told to say, to what the others were saying, he became confused, and somehow mixed up the toast, in his own mind, with his nightly prayers.

"Now, Harry," repeated Mr. Ashton, "don't be bashful." And the little lad, uncertain and timid, put the glass upon the table, and placed the palms of his hands together.

"Pray God bless my dear papa, and keep him from all harm, and send him safe and well home to us again!"

Perhaps those words were as good as the toast; certainly as affecting; for Mr. Ashton took off his spectacles to wipe some mist away; and Clara ran from the room with her emotion.

III.

THE DIARY.

February, 1853.—We are getting on better now: sent down last month to Melbourne about 150*l.* worth of gold, over and above our expenses. But this is slow work; enough to make a man lose heart. Why, at this rate, one might slave for forty or fifty years, and not get above the fortune I thought to take home in two or three. My mate plods on; and, save for an occasional round of oaths, takes it coolly. He has no ties in England anxiously looking for him, and can afford to be cool. The result to me is unsatisfactory, and my spirit chafes at it. Still, one abounds in hope; that's something. A neighbouring party of six, capital fellows too, had met with the most signal non-success since they commenced digging, when suddenly, a month ago, just as they were about to give up, they came upon a rich vein, teeming with gold, and have been netting nuggets ever since.

The state of society here is awful. Society! what a term for it! Last night we were awake out of our sleep by a row close by, and found two men had been murdered. They were thought to be rich in nuggets, stowed away for the next escort, and some of the midnight marauders that prowl about stole into the tent, killed them, and carried off the gold. One of the victims was a gentleman; he came out from England just before I did. His name *here* was William Marshall, but he said that was not his real one. He was from one of the midland counties, had gone the pace, quarrelled with his father; and, one reckless morning, started off here to "redeem himself." Such were his words to me. Poor fellow! he must look for another sort of redemption now. His friends in all probability will ever remain at an uncertainty about his fate. Loud reproaches on the government for not affording us better

protection, are heard on all sides : but, how organize an efficient protection with such a fearful crew? A standing army of British soldiers constantly on duty, could not do it.

Wrote home again to-day, and have told them I am "getting on"—am "well, and happy."

March 8th.—This disabling rheumatism has attacked me again. It is two weeks since I have been able to do a stroke of work. My mate looks dissatisfied, and is turning churlish. He muttered yesterday that one who was only good to cook dampers and brew tea—all I can do just now—was better away from the diggings than at them : and he's right there. Can't even take my trick at washing the linen. I think he meditates being off. Three or four men were put underground this morning ; shot last night in a row. We heard the quarrel ; but quarrels are so common, nobody listens to them.

Oh the desolation and discomfort that exist here ! Some men help themselves on with good-humoured, determined indifference ; thousands with cursing. So long as health lasts, it may be roughed, one way or another ; but when that fails, God help the sufferer !

March 15.—It is as I suspected. Master Cole decamped on Sunday, leaving me solus : so I must get another mate, or join a party. Better ; but still as stiff as a machine. I could not have supposed that success here was so entirely the lottery that it is. At least, I did not think the blanks were so many, the prizes so few. Some do succeed, and so signally, that it is a theme for wonder ; but numbers *do not*. One party, seven in all, have bored hole after hole for months, and have not gained sufficient to pay their expenses up from Melbourne. They have been living upon the funds they brought out ; and a pretty considerable dip it is, weekly. They talk of returning to Melbourne, and seeing if there's anything to be done there. "They'd hoot us for fools, if we went back to England crestfallen and minus what we brought out !" said one to me. If a man's means fail before he can succeed, he has no resource but to hire himself out as a digger—precious hard work it is too !—and what he earns won't much more than keep him, at the rate provisions are. Or else he must leave the diggings altogether, and seek after other work. Egad ! that was an apt quotation of my father's, "All's not gold that glitters !"

March 27.—Easter Sunday. Courage, courage ! Let me not give way to despair ! This wretched rheumatism, stretching me almost continually on my back, hangs about me as if it never meant to quit again ; and dysentery has attacked me now. Half my time I go without food and tea, having no one to prepare it. A friendly visitor looks in some evenings, not always. What are they all doing at home to-day ? Probably dining at my father's. I go mad when I reflect on the time I am losing. Am I to continue in this helpless state ? If so—if so ! Oh, God ! is it a punishment for having thrown up the living of

my family, and abandoned them, to come out on this uncertain scheme?

April 10.—A day of joyful surprise. Davis, my old desk chum at school, has arrived here! I was hobbling out in the sunshine, and came upon him. He did not know me. I should have wondered if he did. Says I look twenty years older, and all the worse for wear. Thank the Fates I have got a friend here now! Thoughts have lately crossed my mind that I might die here, as hundreds of others do, without any one to give notice of it at home.

Davis saw them all just before he started. If he gave me half the messages that were given him, he says, he should have a wonderful memory. Clara was looking well, but thin. She told him I was certain of success, and as happy as I could be, considering I was away from them. Well, it is best that she should think so. My darling little Harry has sent me his first letter, and a message by Davis to say that the words were *not* pencilled. "My dear papa, we hope you are quite well, and mamma is quite well, and Clara is quite well, and Willy and Frank are quite well, and we want you to come home again, and we send you all our kisses, and I am your dear little boy, Harry Ashton." The letter was essentially that of a child, but my eyes were dimmed in reading it, as no other letter has ever dimmed them yet.

Davis's coming has infused into me renewed life. I feel as if my disorder were taking a turn. What a muff I have been to lie fretting here, a prey to the blue devils, yielding to illness instead of shaking it off! Davis is just the fellow for the diggings; healthy, energetic, persevering. I inquired who put it in his head to come. His brains, was the reply, and what was the good of starving on in England, *expecting* briefs? *He* did right to emigrate, for he abandoned no certain income, and had neither wife nor child. He will get on here. He has already formed his party, four of them, people he came up with from Melbourne; decent fellows they seem: and they have agreed to take me in, when I am strong enough. Davis encamps with me, the others are close by. "What blessed water!" Davis exclaims; "it's like pea-soup. D'ye drink this?" And glad to get it.

What a description Davis gives of the state of Melbourne! There are six thousand emigrants encamped in Canvas Town: most of whom would be glad to get home again, but have no means of doing so. Hundreds of gentlemanly fellows are starving: and there are none to help them. They have no work: they don't know how to work; or they cannot get it; or their physical strength and health are unequal to it; or their pride stands in their way: any one of these various reasons may be against them. Numbers of them will die of the fever, now raging in Canvas Town.

May 1.—At work again, though far from strong. Our success is only passable, but Davis is fully satisfied; for, as he says, if *the* nugget does

not come to him one year, it may the next, and he can afford to wait any given time for it. I was too sanguine in the expectations I brought out; Davis says, too impatient. Shall I be home in *five* years with a fortune? Come, that's long enough, surely, and a glum extension of my once brilliant anticipations. *Wait and hope*: I can give myself no other answer.

In the dry season, which prevails in these mines longer than in any in the colony, thousands are at a stand-still from want of water to wash the gold from the earth. Some dig on, keeping the soil till the rains come, some are at the labour and vast expense of carting it, for miles, to where water may be found; but the greater portion remain idle. There is no help for it. And nice associates these choice spirits are, in a period of idleness! though the camp at all times is next to unbearable. Davis, in writing yesterday to a fast friend of his, suggested his coming out here if he wanted a specimen of Pandemonium before he got there. I'd back the language, used, against any ever likely to be heard in the lower regions.

A digger died last night in a neighbouring tent. He had been ill, off and on, with diarrhoea, and it turned into fever. It was his own fault—always at the brandy. Talk about drunkenness being a curse in England! England should see its effects here. He was an actor on the London boards, and came out here to make himself a rich man. We had formed a passing friendship with him, and Davis went in last night to see how he sped. Poor fellow! he was at the last gasp, with neither commiseration nor succour near. His chums had gone off on the loose, leaving him to die as they would have left a dog. A life, more or less, counts for nothing at the diggings.

One party has made 20,000*l.* since the commencement of the year. Three of them to share it. They have gone down to Melbourne, and will come back minus the greater portion of it; perhaps all, for they are of the reckless sort. Lightly come, lightly go.

May 3.—Letters again from England. Clara asks WHEN I am going to return. I wish I could see a prospect of answering her. Unless I went home with a fortune, say sufficient to keep my family, I should look like the veriest fool; and prove myself to have been one. "No despair," calls out Davis. Not a bit of it, if I can only retain health and strength. I rarely feel well now, never strong.

June 24.—Nearly two months since the previous entry in my diary. Surely the last words I wrote were prophetic! "No despair, if I can only retain health and strength!" I have passed, since, through a fearful period of delirium and suffering. For five weeks my life hung upon a thread, and had it not been for Davis's untiring care, I must have died twenty times.

They found a doctor, a clever man, and brought him to me. He comes to see me still. I am never to be hearty more, he says, and if

I want to see home again, must go on board the first vessel sailing for England. I am too ill to think or to act. Davis is arranging all, and has written home for me.

25.—I could not continue yesterday : the pencil fell from my hands. I write as I lie. The pain of the rheumatic fever still racks my limbs, and I shall never again, I suppose, have the free use of them. It was but a common fever at the beginning, the fever of the camp, brought on by dysentery ; but the man they first had to me, some ignorant fellow they picked up, calling himself a medical student, gave me brandy and laudanum and other exciting drinks. I remember taking them : but I do not remember evading Davis, during his momentary absence, and rushing out of the tent into the night air, and wandering, no one knows how far, in my feverish delirium, and sinking down in the wet grass, nearly naked as I was, and lying there till morning. They found me then ; but the mischief was done, and rheumatic fever came raging in every limb. Many a time, in my delirious nights, have I seen and conversed with Clara—been at home with my parents—my children. Shall I live to see them in reality ? A query.

Desolation ! Let those who have never realized the word, come out here, and be as I am. Lying, too weak to help myself, in this wretched tent : which is, now as a burning furnace, from the fierce rays of the meridian sun ; now unbearable from the cold night blasts driven in at the opening ; now soaking with the rain : lying here alone. The tea that Davis leaves me may be drank out by mid-day, and I must lie till night without any, counting the minutes that seem like hours. Fever runs riot in my veins, pain racks every limb ; my tongue is swollen, my throat parched, for want of the drink that I cannot get. So I lie thinking of the home I may never more see ; vainly yearning for it ; and listening to the roar and babel going on outside the tent. A fearful babel : and one little suitable for the ears of a man on the verge of another world.

But, if we are to estimate things by comparison, I have no right to grumble : others here are much worse off than I am. I have a nurse and friend in Davis ; I can make a start to get home : whilst some have, and can do, neither. A poor wretch crawled into the tent to-day, and sunk down in a fearful state of suffering. His hands had been laid open from the use of the pickaxe, and some poison, he was at a loss still to know what, had got into the wounds of his left hand. Never did I see such a sickening sight : and the sufferer said he expected nothing but that mortification would ensue. He had attended to it himself for five weeks, and dressed it in the best way he could, for he was quite alone ; part of the time he had not been able to take his clothes off, or to cook himself food. He must die here, so far as I can see, for it is impossible for him to attempt the journey back to Melbourne. I happened to men-

tion the word "home," and he leaned his head against the flour-bag, and sobbed away like a child. He had been a linendraper's shopman at the West-end, he said, with a fair chance of getting on, his friends very respectable; but he grew dazzled with the mania for gold, and rushed out here after it.

July 5. Melbourne.—Reached here with Davis yesterday. A ship sails for England in a day or two, and I shall sail with her. What should I have done without Davis? Died in the bush, probably. He has been a friend in need.

Got a coach to-day, and went to find the family I made acquaintance with on first landing. What a place this Canvas Town is! The burning sun streaming down on the tents, and the damp, unwholesome earth for a flooring, on which not a plank is allowed to be laid, by this despotic government! C——n and his wife had quitted their tent, but we got a clue to them. They have small lodgings now: a room on the ground-floor, and the use of an adjacent yard. When we went in, Mrs. C——n was standing before a large washing-tub, her hands embedded in the soapsuds. The colour rushed into her pale face, at being found at an employment so little suitable to a lady. Oh! the reverses that must be endured out here! *She was taking in washing, to live!* And this might have been Clara's case! It may be that of any gentlewoman who comes out. She and her husband had agreed that he should try his luck at the diggings, she explained, for to live on as they were living, was disheartening. He had nothing to start him on his journey, or provide tools and a license, for it was impossible to save, out of what he was earning; so, to aid the project, she set up as a washerwoman; she who had been delicately reared, and never, till she came abroad, soiled her hands. C——n started for Mount Alexander in May, and here were she and her children living upon hope and the proceeds of the washing. She looked wistfully at me, hobbling between Davis and a stick, doubting perhaps whether a similar fate might not overtake her husband. "You got that at the diggings?" she asked. "Just so: this is all the diggings have done for me."

"Good Lord!" uttered Davis when we left, "it's just as likely as not that she never hears of that husband of hers again—and then what's to become of her! Sickly and refined, you say he was? *he* won't get on at the diggings. This comes of gentlemen coming out!"

"You are a gentleman yourself, Davis."

"So far as birth and education go; *but I can sink the gentleman into the labourer, and rough it.* It is those who have neither the strength nor the will to do so, that have no business here." Quite true: a man coming here without means, be he gentleman or not, must work as hard as any convict; or starve.

Got as far as the bankers', and to one other house, to whom I brought out letters. Were sorry to see me as I am, they said, but my case was a

very common one. Only, the greater portion of the men that such sickness overtakes, Mr. H——e observed, die off in the diggings.

"How is it," asked an emigrant who happened to be present, one who had just come out, full of hope, "that we hear so little of the black side of things in England? Every account from the colony represents it in glowing colours."

"I can explain it," returned Mr. H——e. "Men who are successful, and numbers are so—though not many, if you take them as a proportion to the whole—write home flowing accounts of their good luck to their relations; perhaps somewhat exaggerated ones, in their exuberance of spirits: and in some instances, their success has really been of an extraordinary nature. These accounts are spread abroad in England by the exulting relatives; they find their way into the public papers; the public read them, everybody talks of them, and the exciting rage for the gold diggings increases. But those who are ill; who die; who are unsuccessful? Of the two former cases, perhaps not one in fifty is known in England; and the latter feel often a reluctance, a sort of shame, at writing of their non-success; especially if they came here in defiance of the advice of their friends."

On board Ship, at Sea, July 25.—So here I am, on my voyage back again! Seventeen months ago I started out, full of energy and hope. And how do I return? Wrecked in health, ruined in prospects, lost in life. I deserve my fate. I held a good position at home; I possessed an ample income; I was happy in a loving family: yet I suffered this mania, this thirst for gold, to lay firm hold upon me, and yielded myself a prey to it. I resisted my father's remonstrances, my wife's entreaties, my friends' ridicule. I have played out my headstrong play, and am going home to die. It is a just reward. *A just reward for me:* but for my wife and children, who will be left alone to struggle with a hard world, what sort of a reward will it be for them? Merciful Heaven, pardon me! Pardon me, and succour them!

August 9.—Shall I live to get home? It is uncertain. Davis little thought I overheard his conference with the steward, when he told him there was a doubt of my lasting to touch land, and asked him to look after me. The sea-air revived me at first, but it was a temporary amelioration. The captain and steward are attentive, and do all they can. One of my fellow-passengers may shake hands with me, for he has likewise been "done up," as he phrases it, at the gold-fields, and is going home to find a corner in an English churchyard! He is in good spirits, and jokes continually; but he has no wife and children, whose prospects he has blighted, to weigh him down. Most of the other passengers are unsuccessful diggers, who have abandoned Australia in disgust; some of them have suffered much in health, but they say England will restore them.

How true were Mr. H——'s words—that England, as a rule, hears

only of the bright side of the picture ! It is computed that for one emigrant who acquires wealth at the diggings, one hundred utterly fail. Many partially succeed : they get their expenses, and save nothing : and for this, they must encounter the reckless disorders of a digger's career and endure its hardships and privations. If an Englishman be but getting a bare living at home, let him stop there, and be thankful !

September 10.—More than half our voyage is over. We have had fair and prosperous winds, and are making way quickly. One of our fellow-passengers is this day consigned to the deep. He had been ailing ever since leaving Melbourne, though none thought he was in danger, and he died this morning. I am often delirious at night from weakness : and my half-paralysed limbs get worse instead of better.

October 5.—Another month will bring us to port. I fear I shall not live to reach it. This day will be the last I shall note in my diary, this, the 5th of October, 1853. I can no longer command even the pencil to write, still less a pen. I have traced a few lines to Clara, praying for forgiveness. Oh, God ! do THOU forgive me !

IV.

WILLOUGHBY ASHTON did live to reach port. His friends were exceedingly astonished to receive an intimation of his arrival ; for the letter forwarded to them by Mr. Davis, giving notice of his state and movements, had shared the fate of many other Australian letters, and had never arrived. They hastened to the ship : and, when the first shock of seeing him was over, caused him to be conveyed home. He was past making exertion for himself then.

For a day or two he seemed to rally : but ere the first week had quite run out, they were gathered round his deathbed ; his wife, her senses confused with anguish, his weeping mother. Mr. Ashton, the old man, shed no tear now, but in the last week he had aged palpably.

Willoughby lay there, a shattered wreck ; his limbs powerless, his cheeks white and hollow, his heart all but broken. In the opinion of the medical men, his rallying might not have been impossible, though a work of time and difficulty, had his mind been at rest. He looked on his wife, soon to be a widow ; on his children, soon to be fatherless, and *portionless*, save what might be spared them by the commiseration of his family ; and he knew that his wilful work had made them so. He might have enjoyed through life a happy home, gliding down its stream calmly and sweetly, with no thought, no care, save how he might do his duty by those around him, and prepare himself and them for a hereafter. But he caught the wild fever that had become rife in the land, obstinately clutched it to him, and so had thrown away the substance to grasp the shadow.

"Tell it out abroad to all," he murmured, as they essayed to moisten his parched lips, while the death agony was coming fast upon him ;

"let the history of my fate be known far and near. It is the fate of hundreds who have gone out to that land of toil in search of gold; it will still be the fate of thousands: tell it out, out, in the wide world. And oh!" he added, vainly endeavouring to raise his powerless hands in prayer, "may the bitter remorse and repentance that accompany me to my grave, be a warning to others who may be tempted as I was. May their daily prayer be, Lord, keep ME from falling into this seductive temptation!"

There's the record. The true record of one man who went out: for how many hundreds, ay, and thousands, it might have served, we shall never know. Will you let it deter *you* from your contemplated voyage, oh sanguine diamond hunter: or will you turn a deaf ear, as did Mr. Ashton? The glowing accounts from Africa are as exaggerated, the wild reports as false, as were those earlier ones from Australia: but they are difficult to refute, and they take the public imagination by storm. Beardless youth believes in them more than in his Bible. The wearing labour and the non-returns, the blasting heat and the aguish damp, the fever and the dysentery, the heart-sickness of prolonged disappointment and the failure of the spirit, all are indigenous to the diamond mountains as they were to the gold plains. Pause, and consider: ere you fling aside home, friends, country, prospects, and the deterring prayers and tears from a mother's aching heart! Sit down and count the cost, before you resolve to embark on a voyage from which there may be no coming back again.

In that case Mr. Ashton's record will not have been reprinted in vain.

ON MOSAIC.

THE great value of Mosaic consists in its indestructibility. The most carefully prepared pigments fade; fresco is affected by damp, and easily injured by accidents. The finest works of Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, and other great masters, are gradually becoming effaced, or clouded in obscurity. A few more generations, and copies more or less imperfect, engravings, and photographs, will be all that remain to verify the tradition of glories that have been; the glow of colour and richness of tone, even now deepening into hues too sombre, will be things of the past.

Mosaic is, as far as human work can go, permanent. Not being merely superficial, the surface may be injured with impunity. Ground down and repolished, the picture reappears in its pristine beauty, all its colours fresh and pure, as when first it left the atelier of the artist.

Had the ancients given as much attention to perfecting the art of working in mosaic as they did to the kindred arts, what invaluable records would have remained to us! The works of Apelles and Zeuxis, had they been imitated in paste, would have become imperishable possessions, and the state of painting in the palmy days of Greece have been no longer a matter of speculation.

It seems that amongst the ancients mosaic was applied merely to decorative purposes; and in Greece, as far as we know, its use was restricted to those pavements called "Lithostrata." Pliny mentions an artist of the name of Sosus, who attained to the greatest excellence in this kind of work. He laid down a pavement at Pergamus, known as the "Asarotus æcus," "the house that has no sweeping," where the remnants of a banquet were represented lying on the floor so naturally, that they had all the appearance of having been left there by accident. There was also a dove imitated in the act of drinking, with the shadow of its head thrown upon the water, and other birds, pluming and sunning themselves on the margin of a bowl. This pavement was considered a marvel in the art of mosaic at that day.

Mosaic work was introduced into Rome in the time of Sylla. A pavement in tesserae was laid down under his direction in the Temple of Fortune, at Præneste. Roman mosaic work was constructed in four different styles—the *opus vermiculatum*, the *opus sectile*, the *opus tessellatum*, and the *opus musivum*. The first three are only suited to pavements, or decorative panels, or borders, being merely a regular arrangement of small stones, or tesserae, in geometrical or other figures. The *opus musivum* was the pictorial mosaic, in which natural objects were represented, and paintings copied.

The word mosaic is said to be derived from the Latin *musivus*. By the French it has been called indifferently mosaic and musaic. The ancient Romans were accustomed to erect pavilions, or summer-houses, in their gardens, where they placed the interesting or curious objects they happened to collect. These pavilions were dedicated to the Muses, and were generally decorated with tessellated pavements and panels. Hence, from the same source, our museum and mosaic.

Pliny observes that, in his time, mosaics had "left the ground for the arched roofs of houses." These more elaborate mosaics were composed of glass; work in this material was then a new invention. The Egyptians of Alexandria were especially skilful in glass work, and in a peculiar kind of small mosaic, a fine specimen of which is amongst the gems in the British Museum. It represents a winged goddess, kneeling, on a ground of blue. The effect is that of an exquisitely-painted miniature, and if the back of this little slab had been polished, as well as the face, it might perhaps never have been recognized as mosaic.

The manner in which the Egyptians produced these miniature mosaics is curious. King thus describes the process:—"A number of fine glass rods, of the colours required, were arranged together in a bundle in such a way that their ends represented the outline and shades of the object to be depicted, as a bird, or a flower, exactly as is practised at present in the manufacture of Tunbridge ware. This bundle was next enclosed in a coating of glass, of a single colour, usually an opaque blue; then the whole mass, being fused together sufficiently to unite all the rods into one compact body, was drawn out to the proper diameter. Thus the rods all became equally attenuated, without losing their relative positions, and the surrounding case of glass, when the whole mass was cut through at certain intervals, formed the ground of a miniature mosaic, apparently composed of the minutest tesserae, put together with inconceivable dexterity and niceness of touch."

It is needless to dwell upon the oft-repeated tale of the decline and renaissance of art; of course mosaic shared the fate of painting and sculpture, and revived with them; though, as was natural, it followed rather than preceded the revival of painting. The church of San Marco, at Venice, is a perfect museum of mosaics, where its history and progress may be traced from the earliest times downwards. There it may be seen in every stage of progress, from the curiously stiff drawing and quaint conceits of the Greek artists from Byzantium, to the expressive and beautiful works of the Zuccati.

In 1225 the works of the Greek artists, at first so much prized, were already surpassed by the Tuscan, Fra Jacopo, or Fra Mino da Turrita, belonging to the order of Minor Friars. He was considered in his day the best living mosaist, and executed works both in Florence and Rome.

At this date there was already a school of mosaists at Rome, in which the family of Cosmati acquired their excellence.

Lorenzo di Medici was an admirer of mosaic—as of all other forms of art—and wished to introduce it into more general use. In a conversation with a Florentine painter of the name of Graffione, Lorenzo mentioned his intention of having a large cupola ornamented with mosaic. The painter replied that he did not think there were artists equal to the task.

“We have money enough to make them,” replied Lorenzo.

Graffione still doubted; but his patron persevered, and entrusted the proposed work to the miniature-painter, Gherardo, who lost no time in producing a specimen, choosing for his subject a head of San Zenobio. This pleased Lorenzo so much that he determined to have the chapel of San Zenobio at Florence enlarged, and decorated with mosaics by Gherardo. He associated with him, however, Dominico Ghirlandajo, who had more invention; and thus the work proceeded satisfactorily.

The next to interest himself deeply in the subject of mosaic was Titian, who furnished designs for the skilful mosaic-workers who were then uprising throughout Italy. It is partly, no doubt, if not principally, to the guidance and encouragement of this great man that we owe the fine works left by Vincenzio Bianchini and Francesco and Valerio Zuccati, sons of Titian’s first master. The “Judgment of Solomon,” in the portico of San Marco, is one of the finest specimens of the mosaic of this period. It is “so beautiful,” says Vassari, “that it could scarcely be executed more delicately with the pencil and colours.”

Since that time, mosaic has been brought more and more into use. It is at present divided into two kinds—the Florentine and the Roman. The Florentine work is in real stone. At first, only black, white, and gray were used, the figures being thus represented in simple *chiaro oscuro*. But about the year 1563, in the time of Duke Cosmo de Medici, many veins of rich marble were discovered near Florence.

This discovery gave a new impetus to the workers in mosaic, who were, by means of these marbles, enabled to imitate the colours as well as the forms of the objects they wished to represent. To these were added lapis lazuli, agates, and even precious stones. When the latter are used, they are sawed into thin laminae, and applied like veneer.

In the execution of this description of mosaic, a slab of marble of the requisite size is prepared for the ground. On this the design is traced; then small cavities are chiselled out, and into these pieces of the requisite colour are introduced. They are fastened into their places by cement, or mastic. The French have also adopted this plan. Though beautiful decorative works may be produced in the Florentine mosaic, it is not so suitable for the imitation of paintings as the Roman. The natural stones are neither sufficiently various nor sufficiently delicate in tint.

The Roman mosaic is executed in coloured glass, of which no less than 10,000 different tints are required and produced. The colour is added when the glass is in a state of fusion. When thoroughly mixed, the liquid is taken out with a large wooden-handled iron ladle, and poured upon a slab of smooth, flat marble. As it cools, it is flattened by the application of another piece of marble, until the mass is an inch or more in thickness. Before the glass cools sufficiently to become hard, it is cut into pieces of the required size and shape by a sharp iron tool. When quite cold, the pieces are placed in a box, each tint having a separate compartment.

Gold and silver are frequently introduced into mosaic. These are prepared as follows: Pieces of yellow glass are moistened with gum-water, and to these gold or silver leaf is applied. The gilded glass is then placed upon an iron shovel at the entrance of the furnace; when it becomes red, it is withdrawn. This process renders the gilding so secure that it is as permanent as the glass itself, and resists any atmospheric influence to which it may be exposed.

A frame is next prepared of the size of the picture about to be imitated. On this is laid a cement, composed of a mixture of chalk, brick-dust, gum adragant, and white of egg. This forms the ground for the design. The same kind of cement is used to fasten the glass cubes in their places. These are arranged with small iron pincers, and beaten down into their places with a wooden ruler or mallet. The surface is thus rendered flat, and is afterwards polished in the same manner as plate glass.

For the small pictorial mosaics, the modern Roman process more nearly approaches that of ancient Alexandria. Small coloured rods are prepared from a kind of easily-fusible glass or enamel. These are softened by the aid of a lamp, and then drawn out into a thread. This is broken off into the lengths required by the thickness of the intended picture. The ground consists of a sheet of copper, overlaid by cement, into which the glass threads are fixed. After the surface is ground and polished, the interstices are filled in with wax of a colour corresponding to the glass. Some interesting specimens of modern Roman mosaic, together with samples of the material, are to be seen in the Geological Museum, in Jermyn Street.

Mosaic copies of the large pictures that are now being made for St. Peter's, at Rome, have occupied from twelve to twenty years; and few even of the smaller copies can be produced in less than five or six. It is by no means such mechanical work as might at first be supposed. A knowledge of art is required, as well as great taste and judgment.

Amongst the modern mosaists of Rome, a lady—the Signora Isabella Barberi—is celebrated for her talent, both in design and execution. Her father, Signor Barberi, fell into bad health, when she undertook the direction of his studio; for in mosaic work, as in many other arts,

there are portions that can be done by inferior hands, under skilful superintendence.

The Cavaliere Luigi Moglia is also an eminent mosaist ; his copy of the Madonna della Seggiola, purchased by the Emperor of the French, is said to be one of the finest modern specimens of the art.

On account of the enormous time and expense required to produce a mosaic picture of any size, the work can never be undertaken with a view to profitable speculation. Such works can only be the result of government patronage, or that of wealthy individuals.

It was not till about the year 1839 that attention was directed towards mosaic work in England. The invention of Mr. Prosser, who contrived a plan of preparing clay so as to form a perfectly uniform and hard substance, first led to it, though his invention was at the time only applied to the manufacture of buttons. Mr. Minton took it up, and turned Mr. Prosser's plan to more valuable use, by manufacturing encaustic tiles. It was farther carried out by Mr. Maw, assisted by Mr. Digby Wyatt ; and these combined labours have resulted in the beautiful tessellated pavements now coming into such general use.

Pictorial mosaic is of still later introduction into this country, though so well adapted to resist the dampness of the climate. The great expense of this kind of work, however, almost precludes its use, except in public buildings. Mr. Penrose calculated that it would cost £50,000 to decorate St. Paul's with mosaic according to the original design of Sir Christopher Wren. These decorations have since been begun, and promise to be successfully carried out by the skill of English workmen. It has been thought advisable to avoid a double experiment at first ; the materials have consequently been procured from the celebrated manufactory of Salviati, at Murano. The Mausoleum, at Windsor, is ornamented in a like manner with what may be called the Venetian mosaic.

When it was found that the frescoes in the Houses of Parliament were beginning to be affected by damp, it was resolved to carry on the decorations in the more durable material. One space—that over the door of the passage leading to the House of Lords—has already been filled in with a mosaic picture representing St. George. The height at which it is placed, and the deficiency of light, forbid examination into the details of workmanship, but the clearness and richness of tone, as compared with fresco, is obvious.

Mosaic work in *pictra dura*, or natural stone, is now also practised in England, but it is, of course, subject to the same limitations as the Florentine work. Thus we may hope to see a school of mosaic successfully established in England, and no doubt at the forthcoming Exhibition, specimens of this beautiful art will form one of its attractions.

OLD LOVE.

Horace. Book 3, Ode 9. Free Translation.

Horace.—WHEN no arm but mine might venture
Round thy snowy neck to twine ;
When thy dear lips' tender kisses
Still were mine and only mine ;
When no other youth was smiled on ;
When you loved but me alone—
I was prouder than the monarch
Seated on his Persian throne.

Lydia.—Ere young Chloe snared your fancy ;
Whilst from all I reigned apart,
In the glory of your favour—
Chosen empress of your heart—
I out-rivalled with my beauty
Roman Ilia's wide renown,
All my far-famed graces heightened
'Neath the radiance of love's crown.

Horace.—Skilled in all sweet modulations,
Mistress of the magic lyre,
Cretan Chloe now commands me,
Kindles sense and soul to fire ;
Till in passion's glowing ardour,
Death's cold steel I'd fearless brave ;
Yield myself a cheerful victim,
If my life her life might save.

Lydia.—I would give *my* life twice over,
If by giving I could gain
Heaven's protection for my darling—
Life, without life's bitter pain,
For my brave and fair young Calais—
Old Ornithus' gallant son,
Who, with gentle, trustful fondness,
All my woman's faith has won.

Horace.—What if our old love, returning,
Trample down the cruel pride
That now parts us, and enchain us
Once more firmly side by side ?
What if, with her siren whispers,
And her gleaming, golden hair,
Chloe from this heart be banished,
And your home be ever there ?

Lydia.—What were then my Thurian lover !
What were all his charms to me !
Though he shines, a star of brightness—
Thou art as the raging sea—
Thou the mocking spray for lightness—
He serene as summer's sky—
Thee alone I'd choose to live with ;
And with thee would love to die.

EMMA RHODES.

COMING HOME TO DIE.

THE snow was falling. At one of the narrow windows of the parlour at Copse farm, stood Susan Page, her bunch of short dark curls combed back from her thin face, her trim figure neat in a merino gown of dusky red. Her own portion of household-work was already done, and she was about to sit down, dressed for the day, to some sewing that lay on the work-table near.

"I was in hopes the snow was over: the morning looked so clear and bright," she said to herself, watching the large flakes. "Leek will have a job to get the truck to the church."

It was a long, narrow room. At the other end by the fire, sat Mr. Page in his arm-chair. He had dropped asleep, his cheek leaning on his hand. As Miss Susan sat down and took up her work, a large pair of scissors fell to the ground with a crash. "Hush—sh—sh!" said she softly, as if the scissors could hear, and glanced round at her father. He did not wake. That stroke of a year ago had dulled his faculties.

"I should uncommonly like to know who did this—whether Sally or the woman," she exclaimed, examining the work she had to do. One of Mr. Page's new shirts had been torn in the washing, and she was about to mend the rent. "That woman has a heavy hand: and Sally a careless one. It ought not to have been ironed."

The door opened, and John Drench came in. When he saw that Mr. Page slept, he walked up the room towards Miss Susan. In the past twelvemonth—for that length of time had rolled on since the trouble about Jessy and her mysterious disappearance—John Drench had had time to return to his first allegiance (or, as Miss Susan mentally put it, get over his folly); and he had decidedly done it.

"Did you want anything?" asked Susan in a cold tone. For she made a point of being short with him—for his own benefit.

"I wanted to ask the master whether he'd have that ditch made, that he was talking of," was the answer. "There's no hurry: not much to be done anywhere while this weather lasts."

She made no comment. John Drench stood, waiting for Mr. Page to wake, looking alternately at the snow and at Miss Susan's steel thimble and nimble fingers. Very deftly was she doing the work, holding the linen gingerly, that the well-ironed bosom and wristbands might not get a crease and unfit the shirt for wear. He was thinking what a good wife she would make: for there was nothing, in the shape of usefulness, that Susan Page could not put her hand to, and put it well.

"Miss Susan, I was going to ask a question of you," he began,

standing uncomfortably on one leg. "I've been wanting to do it for this good bit now, but——"

"Pick up my cotton," said Miss Susan tartly, dropping a reel on purpose.

"But I b'lieve I've wanted courage," resumed he, after doing as he was bid. "It *is* a puzzling task how to do it for the best, and what to say. If you——"

Open flew the door, and in came Miss Page, in her thick white kitchen apron. Her gown-sleeves were rolled above her elbows, her floured hands were but lightly wiped. John Drench, struck into himself, thought he should never have pluck to speak again.

"Susan, do you know where that old red receipt book is?" she asked, in a low tone, glancing at her sleeping father. "I am not certain about the proportions for the lemon-cake."

"The red receipt book?" repeated Susan. "I have not seen it for ever so long."

"Nor I. I don't think I have had occasion to use it since last Christmas Eve. I know I had to look at it then for the lemon-cake. Sally says she's sure it is somewhere in this room."

"Then you had better send Sally to find it, Abigail."

Instead of that, Miss Page began looking herself. On the bookshelves; on the sideboard; in all the nooks and corners. It was found in the empty drawer—empty save for that—of an unused table that stood against the wall.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed, as she drew it out. "I wonder who put it in here!"

In turning over the leaves to look for what she wanted, a piece of paper, loosely folded, fell to the ground. John Drench picked it up.

"Why!" he said, "it is a note from Jessy."

It was the letter written to them by Jessy, saying she had found a situation and hoped to suit and be happy in it. The *one* letter: for no other had ever come. Abigail, missing the letter months ago, supposed it had got burnt.

"Yes," she said with a sigh, as she glanced over the few lines now, standing by Susan's work-table, "it is Jessy's letter. She might have written again. Every morning of my life for weeks and weeks, I kept looking for the letter-man to bring another. But the hope died out at last, for it never came."

"She is a heartless baggage!" cried Miss Susan. "In her grand lady's maid's place, amid her high people, she was content to forget and abandon us. I'd never have believed it of her."

There ensued a pause. The subject was a painful one. Mortifying too: for nobody likes to be forgotten by one that they have loved and cherished and brought up from a little child. Abigail Page had tears in her eyes.

"It's just a year ago to-day that she came into the church to help us dress it," said John Drench, his tender tone of regret grating on Miss Susan's ear. "In her blue mantle ; looking sweeter and brighter than a fairy princess."

"Did you ever see a fairy princess, pray ?" asked Miss Susan, sharply taking him up. "She acted like a princess, didn't she?"

"Best to forget her," interposed Abigail, suppressing a sigh. "As Susan says, she is heartless. Almost wicked : for what is worse than ingratitude ? Never to write : never to let us know where her situation is and with what people : never to ask or care whether her poor father, who had nothing but love for her, is living or dead ! Best to forget her."

She went out of the room with the note and receipt book as she spoke, softly closing the door behind her, as one does who is feeling trouble. Miss Susan worked on with rapid and angry stitches ; John Drench looked out on the low-lying snow. The storm had passed : the sky was blue again.

Yes. Christmas Eve had come round, making it just a year since Jessy in her pretty blue mantle had chosen the sprays of holly in the church. They had never had from her but that one first unsatisfactory letter : they knew no more how she went, or why she went, or where she was, than they had known then. No news whatever came of her : she was as a myth ; as a thing that had never had any place in the world. Within a week or two of the unsatisfactory journey to London, a letter came to the farm from Mr. Marcus Allen, enquiring after Jessy, expressing hopes that she had been found and was home again. It was not answered : Miss Page, busy with her father's illness, neglected it at first, and then thought it did not matter.

Mr. Page recovered from his stroke : but he would never be good for anything again. He was very much changed ; would sit for hours and never speak : at times his daughters thought him a little silly, as if his intellect were failing. Miss Page, with John Drench's help, managed the farm : though she always made it a point of duty to consult her father and ask for his orders. In the month of June they heard again from Marcus Allen. He wrote to say that he was sorry not to fulfil his promise (made in the winter's visit) of coming during the time of hay-making, but he was busy finishing a painting and could not leave it : he hoped to come at some other time.

Susan Page worked on : John Drench looked from the window. The young lady was determined not to break the silence.

"The Dunn farm is to let," said he, suddenly.

"Is it," slightly returned Miss Susan.

"My father has some thoughts of taking it for me. It's good land."

"No better than other land about here."

"It's very good, Susan. And just the place I should like. There's a nice convenient house, too."

Susan Page began rummaging in the deep table-drawer for her box of buttons. She had a great mind to hum a tune.

"But I couldn't take it, or let father take it for me, without you'd promise to go to it with me, Susan."

"Promise to go to it with you, John Drench!"

"I'd make you as good a husband as I know how. Perhaps you'll think of it."

No answer. She was doubling her thread to sew on the button.

"*Will* you think of it, Miss Susan?"

"Well—yes, I will," she said in a softer tone. "And if I decide to bring my mind to have you, John Drench, I'll hope to make you a good and faithful wife."

He held out his hand to shake hers upon the bargain. Their eyes met in kindness: and John Drench knew that the Dunn farm would have its mistress.

We were going to dress the church this year as we did the last. Tod and I got to it early in the afternoon, and saw the Miss Pages wading their way through the coppice, over their ankles in snow.

"Is Leek not here yet!" cried they in surprise. "We need not have made so much haste."

Leek with his large truck of holly was somewhere on the road. He had started, as Miss Page said, while they were at dinner. And he was not to be seen!

"It is all through his obstinacy," cried Susan. "I told him he had better take the highway, though it was a bit further round; but he said he knew he could get well through the little valley. That's where he has stuck."

John Drench came up as she was speaking. He had been on some errand to Church Dykely; and gave a bad account of the snow on the roads. This was the third day of it. The skies just now were blue as in spring; the sun, drawing towards the west, was without a cloud. After waiting a few minutes, John Drench started to meet Leek and help him on; and we cooled our heels in the church-porch, unable to get inside. As it was supposed Leek would be there sooner than anybody else, the key of the church had been given to him that he might get the holly in. There we waited in the cold. At last, out of patience, Tod and I went off in John Drench's wake.

It was as Miss Susan surmised. Leek and his truck had stuck in the valley: a low, narrow neck of land connecting a by-way to the farm with the lane. The snow was above the wheels: Leek could neither get on nor turn back. He and John Drench were hard at work, pulling and pushing; and the obstinate truck refusing to move an inch. With the help of our strength—if mine was not worth much, Tod's *was*—we got it on. But all this caused ever so much delay: and the dressing

was begun when it ought to have been nearing its ending. I could not help thinking of the other Christmas Eve ; and of pretty Jessy who had helped—and of Miss Susan's blowing her up for coming in her best blue mantle—and of the sudden looming in upon us of the stranger, Marcus Allen. Perhaps the rest were thinking about it as I was. One thing was certain—that there was no liveliness in this year's dressing ; we were all as silent and dull as ditch-water. Charley Page, who had made enough noise last year, was away this ; gone to spend the Christmas with some people in Gloucestershire.

The work was in progress, when who should look in upon us but Duffham. He was passing by to visit somebody ill in the cottages. "Rather late, shan't you be?" cried he, seeing that there was hardly any green up yet. And we told him about the truck sticking in the snow.

"What possessed Leek to take it through the valley," returned Duffham.

"Because he is fonder of having his own way than any mule," called out Miss Susan from the aisle.

Duffham laughed. "Don't forget the gala bunch over the parson's head ; it looked well last year," said he, turning to go out. And we told him there was no danger of forgetting it : it was one of our improvements on old Bumford's dressing.

The dark overtook us before half the work was done. There was nothing for it but to get candles from the Copse farm to finish by. Nobody volunteered to fetch them : a walk through the snow did not look lively in prospective to any one of us, and Leek was gone off somewhere. "I suppose it must be me," said John Drench, coming out from amidst the holly to start : when Miss Page suddenly thought that there might be candles in the church. On a winter's afternoon, when it grew dark early and the parson could not see through his spectacles to finish his sermon, Clerk Bumford would go stumping into the place under the belfry, and reappear with a lighted candle and hand it up to the pulpit. It was only natural to suppose the clerk should have a stock of candles in store.

John Drench struck some matches, and we went to explore Bumford's den—a place dimly lighted by the open slits in the belfry above. The first thing seen was his black gown hanging up, next a horn lantern on the floor and the grave-digging tools, then an iron candlestick with an end of candle in it, then a stick half a mile long that he menaced the boys with if they laughed in church ; and next a round tin candle-box on a nail in the wall. It was a prize.

There were ten candles in it. Ten ! Leaving one, in case it should be wanted on the morrow afternoon, the nine others were set alight. One was put in the iron candlestick, the rest we stuck upright in dropped dabs of tallow, anywhere convenient : how else could they be set up ? It was a grand illumination : and we laughed fit to choke

over Clerk Bumford's dismay when he should find his store of candles gone.

That took time : the finding the candles, and the dropping the grease, and the talking and laughing. In the midst of it the clock struck five. Upon that, Miss Abigail told us to hinder no more time, or the work would not get done by midnight. So we set-to with a will. In a couple of hours all the dressing was finished, and the branches were ready to be hung over the pulpit. John Drench felt for the string. He seemed to take his time over it.

"Where on earth is it?" cried he, searching his pockets. "I'm sure I brought some."

He might have brought it ; but it was certain he had not got it then. Miss Abigail, who had no patience with carelessness, told him rather sharply that if he had put it in his pockets at all, there it would be now.

"Well, I did," he answered in his quiet way. "I put it in on purpose. I'm sure I don't know where it can have got to."

And there we were : stuck for a bit of string. Looking at one another like so many helpless noodles, and the flaring candles nearly come to an end. Tod said, tear a strip off the tail of Bumford's gown ; he'd never miss it : for which Miss Abigail gave it him as sharply as if he had proposed to tear it off the parson's.

"I might get a bit at old Bumford's," I said, coming to the rescue. "In a few minutes I'll be back with it."

It was one of the lightest nights ever seen : the air clear, the moon bright, the ground white with snow. Rushing round the north and unfrequented side of the church, where the grass on the graves was long and nobody ever walked, save old Bumford when he wanted to cut across the near way to his cottage, I saw something stirring against the church wall. Something dark : that seemed to have been looking in at the window, and now crouched down with a sudden movement in the corner made by the buttress, as if afraid of being seen.

"Is that you, Leek?"

There was no answer : no movement : nothing but a dark heap lying low. I thought it might be a fox : and crossed over to look.

Well—I had had surprises in my life, but never one that so struck upon me as this. Foxes don't wear women's clothes : this thing did. I pulled aside the dark, covering cloak, and a face stood out white and cold in the moonlight—the face of *Jessy Page*.

You may fancy it is a slice of romance this ; made up for effect out of my imagination : but it is the real truth, as everybody about the place can testify to, and its strangeness is talked of still. But there are stranger coincidences in life than this. On the Christmas Eve, a year before, *Jessy Page* had been helping to dress the church, in her fine

blue mantle, in her beauty, in her light-hearted happiness : on this Christmas Eve when we were dressing it again, she reappeared. But how changed ! Wan, white, faint, thin ! I am not sure that I should have known her but for her voice. Shrinking, as it struck me, with shame and fear, she put up her trembling hands in supplication.

"Don't betray me !—don't call out !" she implored in weak, feverish, anxious tones. "Go away and leave me. Let me lie here unsuspected until they have all gone away."

What ought I to do ? I was just as bewildered as it's possible for a fellow to be. It's no exaggeration to say that I thought her dying : and it would never do to leave her there to die.

The stillness was broken by a commotion. While she lay with her thin hands raised, and I was gazing down on her poor face, wondering what to say, and how to act, Miss Susan came flying round the corner after me.

"Johnny Ludlow ! Mr. Johnny ! Don't go. There's no need. We have found the string under the unused holly. Why !—what's that ?"

No chance of concealment for Jessy now. Susan Page made for the buttress, and saw the white face lying in the moonlight.

"It's Jessy," I whispered.

With a shriek that might have scared away all the ghosts in the churchyard, Susan Page called out for Abigail. They heard it through the window, and came rushing out, thinking Susan must have fallen at least into the fangs of a winter wolf. Miss Susan's voice shook as she spoke : spoke in a whisper.

"Here's Jessy—come back at last !"

Disbelieving Abigail Page went down on her knees in the snow to trace the features, and convince herself. Yes, it was Jessy. She had fainted now, and lay motionless. Leek came up then, and stood staring.

Where had she come from ?—how had she got there ? It was just as though she had dropped from the moon. And what was to be done with her ?

"She must—come home," said Abigail.

But she spoke hesitatingly, as though some impediments might lie in the way : and she looked round in a dreamy way on the open country, all so white and dreary in the moonlight.

"Yes, there's no other place—of course it must be the farm," she added. "Perhaps you can bring her between you. But I'll go on and speak to my father first."

It might have been easy enough for one to carry her, she was so thin and light. John Drench lifted her and they all went off : leaving me and Leek to finish up in the church, and put out the guttering candles.

William Page was sitting in his favourite place, the wide chimney-corner of the kitchen, quietly smoking his pipe, when his daughter

broke in upon him with the strange news. Just in the same way that, a year before, she had broken in upon him with that other news—that a gentleman had arrived, uninvited, on a visit to the farm. This news was more startling than that.

"Are they bringing her home?—how long will they be?" cried the old man with feverish eagerness, as he let fall his pipe, and broke it. "Abigail, will they be long?"

"Father, I want to say something: I came on to say it," returned Miss Page,—and she was trembling too. "I don't like her face: it is wan, and thin, and full of suffering: but there's a look in that—that seems to tell of shame."

"To tell of what?" he asked, not catching the word.

"May heaven forgive me if I misjudge her! The fear crossed me, as I saw her lying there, that her life may not have been innocent since she left us: why else should she come back in this most strange way? Must we take her in all the same, father?"

"Take her in!" he repeated in amazement. "YES. What are you thinking of, child, to ask it?"

"It's the home of me and Susan, father: it has been always an honest one in the sight of the neighbours. May be, they'll be hard upon us for receiving her into it."

He stared like one who does not understand, and then made a movement with his hands, as if warding off her words and the neighbours' hardness together.

"Let her come, Abigail! Let her come, poor stray lamb. Christ wouldn't turn away a little one that had strayed from the fold: should her own father do it?"

And when they brought her in, and put her in an easy chair by the sitting-room fire, stirring it into a hot blaze, and gave her hot tea and brandy in it, William Page sat down by her side, and shed fast tears over her, as he fondly stroked her hand.

II.

GAY and green looked the church on Christmas morning, the sun shining in upon us as brightly as it did a year before. The news of Jessy Page's return and the curious manner of it, had spread about; causing the congregation to turn their eyes in natural instinct on the Pages' pew. Perhaps not one but recalled the last Christmas—and the gallant stranger who had sat in it and found the places for Jessy. Only Mr. Page was there to-day. He came slowly in with his thick stick—for he walked badly since his illness, and dragged one leg behind the other. Before the thanksgiving prayer, the parson opened a paper and read out a notice. Such things were uncommon in our church, and it caused a stir.

"William Page desires to return thanks to Almighty God for a great mercy vouchsafed to him."

We walked to the Copse farm with him after service. Considering that he had been returning thanks, he seemed dreadfully subdued. He didn't know how it was yet; where she had been, or why she had come home in the manner she did, he told the Squire: but, anyway, she had come. Come to die, it might be, but *come home*; and that was enough.

Mrs. Todhetley went upstairs to see her. They had given her the best bed, the one they had put Marcus Allen in. She lay in it like a lily.—It was what Mrs. Todhetley said when she came down: "like a lily, so white and delicate."—There was no talking. Jessy mostly kept her eyes shut and her face turned away. Miss Page whispered that they had not questioned her yet; she seemed too weak to bear it. "But what do you *think*?" asked Mrs. Todhetley in return. "I am afraid to think," was all the answer. In coming away, Mrs. Todhetley stooped over the bed to kiss her.

"Oh don't, don't!" said Jessy faintly: "you might not if you knew all. I am not worth it."

"Perhaps I should kiss you all the more, my poor child," answered Mrs. Todhetley. And she came down stairs with red eyes.

But Miss Susan Page was burning with impatience to know the ins and the outs of the strange affair. Naturally so. It had brought more scandal and gossip on the Copse farm than even the running away of the year before. That was bad enough: this was worse. Altogether Jessy was the home's heartsore. Mr. Page spoke of her as a lamb, a wanderer returned to the fold, and Susan heard it with compressed lips: in her private opinion, she had more justly been called an ungrateful girl.

"Now then, Jessy; you must let us know a little about yourself," began Susan on this same Sunday afternoon when she was with her alone, and Jessy lay apparently stronger, refreshed with the dinner and the long rest. Abigail had gone with Mr. Page to church. Susan could not remember that they had ever gone to church before on Christmas Day after the morning service: but there was no festive gathering to keep them at home to-day. Unconsciously perhaps, Susan resented the fact. "Where have you been all this while in London?"

Jessy suddenly lifted her arm to shade her eyes; and remained silent.

"It *is* in London, I conclude, that you have been? Come: answer me."

"Yes," said Jessy faintly.

"And *where* have you been? In what part of it?—who with?"

"Don't ask me," was the low reply, given with a sob of pain.

"Not ask you! But we must ask you. And you must answer. Where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

"I—can't tell," sobbed poor Jessy, catching up her breath. "The story is too long."

"Story too long!" echoed Susan quickly. "You might say in half a dozen words—and leave close explanations till to-morrow. Did you get a place up in town?"

"Yes, I got a place."

"A lady's maid's place?—as you said."

Jessy turned her face to the wall, and never spoke.

"Now, this won't do," cried Miss Susan, not choosing to be baffled: and no doubt Jessy, hearing the determined tone, felt something like a reed in her hands. "Just you tell me a little."

"I am very ill, Susan; I can't talk much," was the pleading excuse. "If you'd only let me be quiet."

"It will no more hurt you to say in a few words where you have been than to make excuses that you can't say," persisted Miss Susan, giving a flick to the skirt of her new puce silk gown. "Your conduct altogether has been most extraordinary, quite baffling to us at home, and I must hear some explanation of it."

"The place I went to was too hard for me," said Jessy after a pause, speaking out of the pillow.

"Too hard!"

"Yes; too hard. My heart was breaking with its hardness, and I couldn't stop in it. Oh, be merciful to me, Susan! don't ask more."

Susan Page thought that when mysterious answers like these were creeping out, there was all the greater need that she should ask more.

"Who got you the place at first, Jessy?"

Not a word. Susan asked again.

"I—got it through an advertisement," said Jessy at length.

Advertisements in those days, down in our rural district, were looked upon as wonderful things, and Miss Susan opened her eyes in surprise. A faint idea pervaded her that Jessy could not be telling the truth.

"In that letter that you wrote to us; the only one you did write; you asserted that you liked the place."

"Yes. That was at first. But after—oh, after it got cruelly hard."

"Why did you not change it for another?"

Jessy made no answer. Susan heard the sobs in her throat.

"Now, Jessy, don't be silly. I ask why you did not get another place, if you were unable to stay in that one?"

"I couldn't have got another, Susan. I would never have got another."

"Why not?" persisted Susan.

"I—I—don't you see how weak I am?" she asked with some energy, showing her face for a moment to Susan.

And its wan pain, its depth of anguish, disarmed Susan. Jessy looked like a once fair blossom on which a blight had passed.

"Well, Jessy, we will leave these matters until later. But there's one thing you must answer. What induced you to take this disreputable mode of coming back?"

A dead silence.

"Could you not have written to say you were coming, as any sensible person would, and been properly met and received? Instead of appearing like a vagabond, to be picked up by anybody."

"I never meant to come home here."

"But *why*?" asked Susan.

"Oh, because—because of my ingratitude in running away—and never writing—and—and all that."

"That is, you were ashamed to come and face us."

"Yes, I was ashamed," said Jessy, shivering.

"And no wonder. Why did you go?"

"Jessy gave a despairing sigh. Leaving that question in abeyance, Susan returned to the former one.

"If you did not mean to come home, what brought you down here at all?"

"It didn't matter where I went. And my heart was yearning for a look at the old place—and so I came."

"And if we had not found you under the church wall—and we never should but for Johnny Ludlow's running out to get some string—where should you have gone, pray?"

"Crawled under some haystack, and let the cold and hunger kill me."

"Don't be a simpleton," reproved Susan.

"I wish it had been so," returned Jessy. "I'd rather be dying there in quiet. Oh, Susan, I am ill; I am indeed! Let me lie at peace!"

The appeal shut up Susan Page. She did not want to be too hard.

Mr. Duffham came in after church. Abigail had told him that she did not like Jessy's looks; nor yet her cough. He went up alone, and was at the bed side before Jessy was aware. She put up her hand to hide her face, but not in time: Duffham had seen it. Doctors don't get shocks in a general way: they are too familiar with appearances that frighten others: but he started a little. If ever he saw coming death in a face, he thought he saw it in that of Jessy Page.

He drew away the shading hand, and looked at her. Duffham was pompous on the whole and thought a good deal of his gold-headed cane, but he was a tender man with the sad and sick. After that, he sat down and began asking her a few things—where she had been, and what she had done. Not out of curiosity, or quite with the same motive that Miss Susan had just asked; but because he wished to find out whether her illness was most on the body or the mind. She would not answer. Only cried softly.

"My dear," said Duffham, "I must have you tell me a little of the

past. Don't be afraid : it shall go no farther. If you only knew the strange confidences that are sometimes placed in me, Jessy, you would not hesitate."

No, she would not speak of her own accord, so he set on to pump her. Doing it very kindly and soothingly : had Jessy spent her year in London robbing all the banks, one might have thought she could but have yielded to his wish to come to the bottom of it. Duffham listened to her answers, and sat with a puzzled face. She told him what she had told Susan : that her post of lady's maid had been too hard for her and worn her to what she was ; that she had shrunk from returning home on account of her ingratitude, and should not have returned ever of her own will. But she had yearned for a sight of the old place, and so came down by rail, and walked over after dark. In passing the church she saw it lighted up ; and lingered, peeping in. She never meant to be seen ; she should have gone away somewhere before morning. Nothing more.

Nothing more ! Duffham sat listening to her. He pushed back the pretty golden hair (no more blue ribbons in it now), lost in thought.

"*Nothing* more, Jessy ? There must have been something more, I think, to have brought you into this state. What was it ?"

"No," she faintly said : "only the hard work I had to do ; and the thought of how I left my home ; and—and my unhappiness. I was unhappy always, nearly from my first entering. The work was hard."

"What was the work ?"

"It was——"

A long pause. Mr. Duffham, always looking at her, waited.

"It was dress-making. And—there was sitting-up at nights."

"Who was the lady you served ? What was her name ?"

"I can't tell it," answered Jessy, her cheeks flushing to a wild hectic.

The surgeon suddenly turned the left hand towards him and looked at the forefinger. It was smooth as ivory.

"Not much sign of hard work there, Jessy."

She drew it under the clothes. "It is some little time since I did any ; I was too sick," she answered. "Mr. Duffham, I have told you all there is to tell. The place was too hard for me, and it made me ill."

It was all she told. Duffham wondered whether it was, in substance, all she had to tell. He went down and entered the parlour with a grave face : Mr. Page, his daughters, and John Drench were there. The doctor said Jessy must have perfect rest, tranquillity, and the best of nourishment ; and he would send some medicine. Abigail put a shawl over her head, and walked with him across the garden.

"You will tell *me* what your opinion is, Mr. Duffham."

"Ay. It is no good one, Miss Abigail."

"Is she very ill?"

"Very. In so far as that I do not think she will materially rally. Her chest and lungs are both weak."

"Her mother's were before her. I told you Jessy looks to me just as my mother used to look in her last illness."

Mr. Duffham went through the gate without saying more. The snow was sparkling like diamonds in the moonlight.

"I think I gather what you mean," resumed Abigail. "That she is, in point of fact, dying."

"That's it. As I truly believe."

They looked at each other in the clear light air. "But not—surely, Mr. Duffham, not immediately?"

"Not immediately. It may be weeks off yet. Mind—I don't assert that she is absolutely past hope: I only think it. It is possible that she may rally and recover."

"It might not be the happier for her," said Abigail under her breath. "She is in a curiously miserable state of mind—as you no doubt saw. Mr. Duffham, did she tell you anything?"

"She says she took a place as lady's maid; that the work proved too hard for her; and that, with the remorse for her ingratitude towards her home, made her ill."

"She said the same to Susan this afternoon. Well, we must wait for more. Good night, Mr. Duffham; I am sure you will do all you can."

Of course Duffham meant to do all he could: and from that time he began to attend her regularly.

Jessy Page's coming home, with, as Miss Susan had put it, the vagabond manner of it, was a nine days' wonder. The neighbours went making calls at the Copse farm, to talk about it and to see her. In the latter hope they failed. Jessy showed a great fear of seeing any one of them: would put her head under the bed-clothes and lie there shaking till the house was clear: and Duffham said she was not to be crossed.

Her sisters got to know no more of the past. Not a syllable. They questioned and cross-questioned her; but she only stuck to her text. It was the work that had been too much for her; the people she served were cruelly hard.

"I really think it must be so: that she has nothing else to tell," remarked Abigail to Susan one morning as they sat alone at breakfast. "But she must have been a downright simpleton to stay."

"I can't make her out," returned Susan, hard of belief. "Why should she not say where it was, and who the people are? Here comes the letter-man."

The letter-man—as he was called with us—was bringing a letter for Miss Page. Letters at the Copse farm were rare, and she opened it

with curiosity. It proved to be from Mrs. Allen of Aberystwith: and out of it dropped two cards, tied together with silver cord.

Mrs. Allen wrote to say that her distant relative, Marcus, was married. He had been married on Christmas Eve to a Miss Mary Goldbeater, a rich heiress, and they had sent her cards. Thinking the Miss Pages might like to see the cards (as they knew something of him) she had forwarded them.

Abigail took the cards up. "Mr. Marcus Allen. Mrs. Marcus Allen." And on hers was the address: "Gipsy Villas, Montgomery Road, Brompton." "I think he might have been polite enough to send us cards also," observed Abigail.

Susan put the cards on the waiter when she went up-stairs with her sister's tea. Jessy, looking rather more feverish than usual in a morning, turned the cards about in her slender hands.

"I have heard of her, this Mary Goldbeater," said Jessy, biting her parched lips. "They say she's pretty: and—and very rich."

"Where did you hear of her?" asked Susan.

"Oh, in—let me think. In the work-room."

"Did you ever see Mr. Marcus Allen when you were in town?"

"Mr. Marcus Allen?" repeated Jessy after a pause—just as if she were unable to recall who Mr. Marcus Allen was.

"The Mr. Marcus Allen you knew at Aberystwith; he who came here afterwards," went on Susan impatiently. "Are you losing your memory, Jessy?"

"No, I never saw the Marcus Allen I knew here—and there," was Jessy's answer, her face white and still as death.

"Why!—Did you know any other Marcus Allen, then?" questioned Susan, in surprise. For the words had seemed to imply it.

"No," replied Jessy. "No."

"She seems queerer than usual—I hope her mind's not going," thought Susan. "Did you ever go to see Madame Caron, Jessy, while you were in London?"

"Never. Why should I? I didn't know her."

"When Marcus Allen wrote to excuse himself from visiting us in the summer, he said he would be sure to come later," resumed Susan. "I wonder if he will keep his promise."

"No: never," answered Jessy.

"How do you know?"

"Oh—I don't think it. He'd not care to come, I fancy. Especially now he's married."

"And you never saw him in town, Jessy? Never even met him by chance?"

"I've told you—No. Do you suppose I should be likely to call upon Marcus Allen? As to meeting him by chance, it is not often I went out, I can tell you."

"Well, sit up and take your breakfast," concluded Susan.

A thought had crossed Susan Page's mind—whether this marriage of Marcus Allen's on Christmas Eve could have had anything to do with Jessy's return and her miserable unhappiness. It was but a thought: and she drove it away again. As Abigail said, she had been inclined throughout to judge hardly of Jessy.

The winter snow lay on the ground still, when it became a question not of how many weeks Jessy would live, but of days. And then she confessed to a secret that pretty nearly changed the sober Miss Pages' hair from black to grey. Jessy had turned Roman Catholic.

It came out through her persistent refusal to see the old parson: a fat little man with shaky legs. He'd go trotting up to the Copse farm once or twice a week; all in vain. Miss Abigail would console him with a good hot jorum of sweet elder wine, and then he'd trot back again. One day Jessy, brought to bay, confessed that she was a Roman Catholic.

There was fine commotion. John Drench went about with his hands lifted in the frosty air; Abigail and Susan Page sat in the bedroom with (metaphorically speaking) ashes on their heads.

"Miserable creature!" exclaimed Miss Susan, privately looking upon Jessy as next door to lost. And Jessy told, through her sobs, how it had come to pass.

Wandering about one evening in London when she was very unhappy, she entered a catholic place of worship styled an "Oratory."—The Miss Pages caught up the word as "oratorio," and never called it anything else.—There a priest got into conversation with Jessy. He had a pleasant kind manner that won upon her and drew from her the fact that she was unhappy. Become a catholic, he said to her; that it would bring back her happiness: and he asked her to go and see him again. She went again; again and again. And so, going and listening to him, she at length *did* turn, and was received by him into his church.

"Are you the happier for it?" sharply asked Miss Abigail.

"No," answered Jessy with distressed eyes. "Only—only——"

"Only what, pray?"

"Well, they can absolve me from all sin."

"Oh you poor foolish misguided child!" cried Abigail in anguish. "you must take your sins to the Saviour: He can absolve you, and He alone. Do you want any third person, and that a man, to stand between you and Him?"

Jessy gave a sobbing sigh. "It's best as it is, Abigail. Anyway, it is too late now."

They did not tell Mr. Page: it would have distressed him too much

Jessy asked to see a priest. Miss Abigail flatly refused, on account of the scandal.

One afternoon I was standing by Jessy's bed—for Miss Abigail had let me go up to see her. Mrs. Todhetley, that first day, had said she looked like a lily: she was more like one now. A faded lily that has had all its brightness washed out of it.

"Good bye, Johnny Ludlow," she said, opening her eyes, and putting out her feeble hand. "I shall not see you again."

"I hope you will, Jessy. I'll come over to-morrow."

"Never again in this world." And I had to lean over to catch the words, and my eyes were full.

"In the next world there'll be no parting, Jessy. We shall see each other there."

"I don't know," she said. "You will be there, Johnny; I can't tell whether I shall be. I turned Roman Catholic, you see; and Abigail won't let a priest come. And so—I don't know how it will be."

It was not pleasant to hear that: it seemed worse for me to hear it than to her to say it. But she had got too weak to feel things strongly.

"Good bye, Johnny."

"Good bye, Jessy dear," I whispered. "Don't fear: God will be sure to take you to Heaven if you ask Him."

Miss Abigail got it out of me—what she had said about the priest. In fact, I told. She was very cross.

"There; let it drop, Johnny Ludlow. John Drench is gone off in the gig to find one. All I hope and trust is, that they'll not be back until the shades of night have fallen to hide the earth! I'd not like for a priest to be seen coming into *this* door."

We all have our prejudices. And not a soul amongst us for miles round had found it necessary to change religions since the Reformation.

Evening was well on when John Drench brought him in. A mild-faced man, wearing a skull-cap under his hat. He saw Jessy alone. Miss Page would not have made a third at the interview though they had bribed her to—and of course they'd not have had her. It was quite night when he came down. Miss Page stopped him as he was going out.

"I presume, sir, she has told you all about this past year—that has been so mysterious to us?"

"Yes; I think all," replied the priest.

"Will you tell me the particulars?"

"I cannot do that," he said. "They have been given to me under the seal of confession."

"Only to me and to her sister Susan," pleaded Abigail. "We will not even disclose it to our father. Sir, it would be a true kindness to us, and it can do no harm. You do not know what our past doubts and distress have been."

But the priest shook his head. He was very sorry to refuse, he said, but the tenets of his church forbade his speaking. And Miss Page thought he *was* sorry, for he had a benevolent face.

"Best let the past lie, daughter," he said. "Suffice it to know that she is happy now and will die in peace."

They buried her in the churchyard beside her mother. When the secret got about, some said it was not right—that she ought to have been taken elsewhere, dying a Roman Catholic. Which would just have put the finishing stroke on old Page—broken all of his heart there was left to break. The squire said he didn't suppose it mattered in the sight of God: or would make much difference at the Last Day.

And that ended the life of Jessy Page: and, in one sense, its episode of mystery. Nothing more was ever heard or known of where she had been or what she had done. Years have gone by since; and William Page is lying by her. Miss Page and Charley live on at the Copse farm; Susan has been Mrs. John Drench ages ago. Her husband, a man of substance now, was driving her into Alcester last Tuesday (market-day) in his four-wheeled chaise, two buxom daughters in the back seat. I nodded to them from Mr. Brandon's window.

There's nothing more to tell. The mystery of Jessy Page (as we grew to call it) remains a mystery. What the secret was—if there was a secret—why she went in the way she did, and came back in what looked like shame and fear and trembling, a dying girl—has not been solved. It never will be in this world. Some put it all down to her having changed her religion and been afraid to tell: while Miss Abigail has never got rid of a vague doubt, touching Marcus Allen. But it may be only her fancy; and it's not right to judge a man without cause. He keeps a carriage-and-pair now, with servants outside it; and gives dinners, and has handsome daughters growing up; and is altogether grand, quite up to the present style of expensive life in London.

And I never go into church on a Christmas morning: whether it may be one of our simple country ones, green with its branches of holly, or one of your new "artistic" achievements, great in flowers of many colours, and tawdry scrolls, but I think of Jessy Page. Of her sweet face, her simplicity, and her want of guile: and of the poor wan wreck that came back, broken-hearted, to die.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



WIVES AND LOVES OF CELEBRATED MEN.

IT is remarkable how much sentiment has swayed, if not ruled, the lives and fates of some of the most celebrated men whose footsteps have "echoed through the corridors of Time." There is hardly any name in history or biography but it is linked, however slightly, with one which, at some time during his career, caused him the same feelings, the same hopes, and fears, and fancies known to the commonest of mortals.

And the reason? It is simply this—that men cannot help themselves. They may rave against love as they please, but they succumb to its force. From the days of Helen down to our time it has held its own. And it will. As for the men who have abused the sex most heartily, and fled from its presence most carefully, depend upon it they are the ones who have most dreaded its power. Boyle, in spite of his article against the fairer portion of creation, is said to have died of grief through the death of his wife, for whom he mourned unceasingly for three years; and Sir Thomas Browne, who declared matrimony to be "the foolishhest act a wise man commits in all his life," married, and had four daughters. No doubt, too, if in bygone ages old St. Cuthbert had not quaked in his shoes (that is, supposing he allowed himself to indulge in those luxuries) for his firmness, he would never have ordered that railing to be placed round his tomb, lest, even after his death, the foot of woman should wander near him.

It is a glorious destiny to a right-minded woman to be the wife of a really great man. To soothe him in grief, and comfort him in sorrow; to hide the petty cares of life from him; to rejoice in his happiness, and exult in his successes; to share his secret thoughts and hopes; to listen to his schemes, and discuss his projects, and by loving care and thoughtfulness smooth out those little peculiarities and eccentricities which so frequently cling to genius, as creases rest on the finest fabric. To know that the moments he does not give the world he gives to her; to know, above all, that she influences his life, as every woman does influence the life of the man who really loves her—and genius and greatness are not niggardly in their affection—for what better lot can she hope? Or even to be loved truly, and purely, and unselfishly—though that be the ending, though she never hears the word "wife" from his lips—it is sufficient to compensate for a whole world of sorrow, a whole life of care. To go down from generation to generation, as Beatrice's name has gone down—the loved of Dante! Or even to be remembered from the last generation, as we remember Southey's young bride, watching her husband from the shore through her blinding tears,

with her wedding-ring tied round her neck ! To what happier destiny can she aspire ? The history of such women must have an interest for the coldest, the gravest, the most matter-of-fact of us all.

Love has been the making of countless poets. Shakespeare says :—

“ Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink is tempered with love’s sighs.”

And another celebrated writer has declared that without a love cross it is impossible to make a poet. Men of genius are influenced immeasurably by their domestic relations. “ They cannot pass the age of Love without its passion,” Disraeli remarks ; “ their imagination is perpetually colouring those pictures of domestic happiness on which they delight to dwell. He who is no husband sighs for the tenderness which is at once bestowed and received, and tears will start in the eyes of him who in becoming a child feels that he is no father.” There is hardly any picture in biography more sad than that Thomas Hollis has left of himself in his own extraordinary memoirs. Devoting himself exclusively to literature and republicanism, he shunned the holy state lest it should interfere with his pursuits. Yet in later years he broke down and retired to the country, “ a used man to pass the remainder of a life in tolerable sanity and quiet after having given up the flower of it voluntarily, day, week, month, year after year successive to each other, to public service.” And a well-known writer has devoted a whole paper to endeavouring to prove that Johnson would never have treasured up bits of orange-peel, and have been remembered for his post-touching fancy, if instead of being the slave of an idea, he had had a genial and companionable wife to soothe his declining years. “ To have some secret darling idea,” wrote Thompson to Mallet, speaking of Amanda, “ to which one can still have recourse amidst the noise and nonsense of the world, and which never fails to touch one in the most exquisite manner, is happiness fortune cannot deprive us of. This may be romantic, but the effect is really felt.”

Matrimony has often been considered prejudicial to ambition. What room has a man for ambition, it has been asked, in the midst of domestic happiness and home ties ? Many have persistently adhered to celibacy for this reason,—among them (taking literary men) Boyle, Newton, Locke, Leibnitz, Hobbes, Hume, Adam Smith, Gibbon ; and many others. The first quarrelled with his librarian on the subject, insisting that a man fettered with a wife could not take proper charge of a public library.

“ Married ! ” exclaimed Sir Joshua Reynolds to a young painter, “ then you are ruined as an artist ! ” And, going farther back, we find Michael Angelo’s memorable answer to a friend who counselled conjugal felicity. “ I have espoused my art ; and it occasions me sufficient domestic cares, for my works shall be my children. What would

Bartholomeo Chiberti have been had he not made the gates of St. John? His children consumed his fortune, but his gates, worthy to be the gates of Paradise, remain."

There is nothing more remarkable concerning men of genius than the number that have married unhappily, unless it is that many of them have married unmeasurably beneath their station. Their wives have been "dissolute, ill-humoured, slatternly," and frivolous. Countless men have married shrews. Ben Jonson's domestic happiness is summed up in the few words of Drummond of Hawthornden: "He married a woman who was honest to him, but a shrew." Milton's first wife ran away in a month, thereby originating his celebrated treatise on divorce, and Dryden's spouse, among other freaks, wished herself one of the books which engrossed so much of his attention. In this wish the poet politely agreed, adding, he should have preferred her being an almanack, in which case he could have changed her once a year!

Perhaps the best story is that told by Disraeli of Berghem's wife. "She would never allow that excellent artist to quit his occupations, and she contrived an odd expedient to detect his indolence. The artist worked in a room above her, ever and anon she roused him by thumping with a long stick against the ceiling, which the obedient Berghem answered by stamping his foot to satisfy Mrs. Berghem that he was not napping."

The most wretched man through his matrimonial misfortunes would seem to have been Domenichino, who, having married a beauty, lived in constant dread lest her avarice should tempt her to poison him. After his death, which has been attributed to that cause, Passeri made this comment upon him, "*Così fra mille crepacuori morì uno di più eccellenti artefici del mondo; che oltre al suo valore pettorico avrebbe più d'ogin maritato di viver sempre par l'onestà personale.*"

The most puzzling to understand are such marriages as Goethe's and Rousseau's. How could the great German poet, after the pretty episode of his youth, and his love for a duchess, marry a servant? And how could Rousseau bring himself to live with a low ignorant woman who forced him, from shame, into solitude, where, confessing his error, and sighing for the advantage of living with another "who could think?" he acknowledged all the "intolerable tedium of a tête-à-tête." How can such men make such mistakes? Hanging millstones round their necks, which there is no shaking off, and no tightening, unless he has patience enough to educate her, or (what is rarer) she has intelligence enough to educate herself.

From Socrates, who bowed his head beneath the avenging storm of Xantippe's wrath, to simple-hearted Goldsmith whose happiest moments were those in which the "Jessamy Bride" laughed at his foibles: all have at some time bowed to the blind god, and, for a time, at any rate, submitted to his guidance.

MRS. AP-JONES'S PUDDING.

THEY lived in Wales, and the farmer was well to-do, and all the household were economical, not thinking of meat every day, or anything like as often. The two daughters were named Reliance and Prudence; the sons Amos and James. Reliance was soon to be married to David ap-Thomas at the next farm.

"We'll have a hasty pudding for dinner to-day, mother," said Farmer ap-Jones to his wife one morning at breakfast.

"Very well, Evan," replied Mrs. ap-Jones: for his will was law.

So when it was time she began to make the pudding. Her husband and sons were out at their work in the spring sunshine; her daughters were making the beds upstairs.

"I mustn't forget the salt this time," cried Mrs. ap-Jones to herself: "there was a fine fuss from all of 'em about it last."

For Mrs. ap-Jones, good housewife though she was, was apt to forget to put salt in her hasty puddings, or not to put enough of it. She put plenty this time; for they were all fond of salt. Then she went up to the linen-room and began laying the winter clothing away in camphor.

It was only a few moments before Reliance came into the kitchen, when, seeing the pudding cooking, and knowing that her mother was apt to forget to salt it, she put in a handful of salt and stirred it well, so that her father would not have occasion to find fault.

Soon after, Prudence passed through the kitchen on her way to the brew-house. "Mother's sure to have forgot the salt," said she, and added a good handful.

Before long, Amos entered to get a jug of beer. And soon after James came in. Each of them put in a handful more salt, as they had no more faith in their mother's remembering it than Reliance or Prudence had.

Just before dinner, Farmer ap-Jones returned from the fields, and saw the pudding cooking.

"That pudding smells uncommon good," said he. "But," added the farmer approaching the kettle, "I'll bet a sixpence the wife's forgot to salt it, as she always does. I used to depend upon Reliance, till she got her head chock full of that young man o' hern; no chance of her thinkin' on't now. As to Prudence—well, she don't meddle much in the cooking; so I'll just put the salt in myself." And taking off the lid, he flung in a large handful and a half, stirring the pudding round briskly.

Twelve o'clock came, and they all sat down to table. Mrs. ap-Jones

helped her husband to a good serving ; for he loved it well, and had besides a sharp appetite. Just a spoonful he took, and leaped up.

"Who on earth salted this here pudding? It—"

Farmer ap-Jones stopped : he suddenly remembered that he had salted it himself. Just then there was a great noise in the stable.

"I should think that thundering colt's a-trying to kick in the barn-door," said he, and rushed out.

The next to try the pudding was Amos. No sooner had he got it in his mouth, than he leaped up too. And went off to see what that colt *could* be doing. And each one, James, Reliance, and Prudence started away in like manner, leaving Mrs. ap-Jones in amazement. For each one, you see, silently took credit for the hard salting.

"Lawk a mercy," cried Mrs. ap-Jones, swallowing down her first mouthful. "This comes o' my having put in all that there salt. What could I ha' been thinking of?—But they used to say I'd a heavy hand at salting."

The proof of the pudding is in the eating.



THE COMET.

BY MM. ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN.

LAST year, just before the Carnival, there was a report in Hunebourg that the world was coming to an end. Doctor Zacharias Piper, of Colmar, first spread this disagreeable news ; it was spoken of in the "Lame Messenger," in the "Perfect Christian," and in fifty other journals.

Zacharias Piper had calculated that a comet would descend from the skies on Shrove Tuesday, having a tail formed of boiling water, one hundred and five million miles in length, which would pass over the earth, melt the snow on the highest mountains, wither the trees, and burn up everybody.

A learned man, named Popinot, had written from Paris to say that there was no doubt the comet would come, but that its tail would be composed of such light vapours as to cause no one the least inconvenience ; that people might go on quietly with their business ; that he would answer for everything. This assurance allayed much alarm.

But, unfortunately, there lives at Hunebourg, in the little street of the "Three Jugs," an old wool spinner, named Maria Finck. She is a little, pale, withered old woman, covered with wrinkles, whom people go and consult on the most delicate and important affairs of life. She lives in a low room, the ceiling of which is decorated with painted eggs,

red and blue stripes, gilded nuts, and a thousand other fanciful objects. She dresses herself up in old finery and lives on *échaudé*, which two things give her great authority in the neighbourhood.

Maria Finck, instead of approving of good M. Popinot's opinion, declared herself to be on the side of Zacharias Piper, and kept saying : "Be converted, and pray ; repent of your sins, and give to the Church, for the end of the world is at hand, the end is at hand !"

At the furthest part of her room was a picture of Hell, to which people were going down by a path all sown with roses. None of them seemed to have a suspicion about the place to which this road was leading them ; they were dancing along, some with a bottle in their hands, some with a ham, others with a string of sausages. A workman, with ribbons flying from his hat, was playing the clarionet to amuse them on their way. Some were kissing their partners, and all these poor wretches were heedlessly approaching the path full of flames, into which already the foremost were falling, their arms extended and their legs in the air.

It is easy to imagine what would be the reflections of every sensible person on looking at this picture. No one is so virtuous as not to have a certain number of sins on his conscience.

So most of the people of Hunebourg agreed that they would have no Carnival, but spend Shrove Tuesday in acts of repentance.

Never had such a thing been heard of before. The adjutant and captain, as well as the non-commissioned officers in garrison, at Hunebourg, were quite in despair. All the preparations for the fête—the decoration of the great hall of the mayoralty with moss and trophies of arms ; the stage raised for the orchestra ; the beer, *kirsch*, and *bischof*, ordered for refreshments ; in short, all their arrangements were to be of no use, since the young ladies of the town would no longer hear a word about the dance.

"I am not a cruel fellow," said Sergeant Duchêne ; "but if I got hold of your Zacharias Piper he should have a hard time of it."

But with all this, those who were most distressed and disappointed were Daniel Spitz, the secretary of the mayoralty ; Jerome Bertha, the postmaster's son ; Dujardin, the tax-collector ; and I. A week before we had gone to Strasbourg on purpose to buy ourselves fancy costumes. Uncle Tobias had given me fifty francs out of his own pocket, so that I need spare nothing. I therefore had chosen for myself, at Mademoiselle Dardenai's, the costume of a clown. This consists of a kind of shirt, with wide folds and long sleeves, trimmed with onion-shaped buttons as big as one's fist, which are set so close from the chin down to the knee, as to rattle against each other. A little black skull-cap is to be worn on the head, and the face whitened with flour. Provided one has a long nose, and deep sunken eyes, the effect is admirable.

Dujardin, because of his fat paunch, had chosen a Turkish costume, embroidered up all the seams; Spitz, the dress of Punch, made of a thousand pieces of red, green, and yellow stuff; a hump in front, one behind, and a great gendarme's hat to be worn on the back of his head; nothing could be better. Jerome Bertha was to be a savage, and was to have a plume of parrot's feathers.

We felt sure beforehand that all the young girls would leave the soldiers to have us as their partners.

And after having spent all this money, was it not enough to set one against the whole human race, to see everything go to the deuce, all through the stupidity of an old mad woman, or of a Zacharias Piper!

Well, people are always the same, and fools will ever have the best of it.

At last Shrove Tuesday arrived; the sky was heavy with snow. One looked right and left, up and down—no comet was to be seen. The girls all seemed quite bewildered. Off ran the young fellows to the houses of their cousins, aunts, and godmothers, saying:—"You see now that old mother Finck is mad, and that there's no sense whatever in your notions about the comet. Do comets ever come in the winter? Do they not always choose the vintage time? Well, well, you must now decide—there's still time," &c., &c.

The soldiers, on their side, went into the kitchens, and talked to the maid-servants, exhorting them, and loading them with reproaches. Many people began to pluck up courage. The old men and women went arm-in-arm to see the decorations of the great hall of the mayoralty; the stars made of sabres, and the little tricolored flags between the windows, excited universal admiration. Then people's minds began to change; they remembered that it was Shrove Tuesday. Suddenly, all the young ladies made haste to get their smart petticoats out of their cupboards, and to wax their shoes.

By ten o'clock the great hall of the mayoralty was full of people; we had carried the day; there was not a single girl in Hunebourg who did not answer to the call. The clarionets, the trombones, the big drums, resounded; the lights sparkled in the windows, the country dances went merrily, the waltzers whirled round madly; the young men and girls were in a state of wild enjoyment; the old grandmothers seated against the walls were laughing heartily. At the refreshment counters people were shoving each other about; the drinks could not be served quick enough, and father Zimmerman, who had a contract for the supply, might boast of feathering his nest well that night.

Those who had taken rather too much began to stumble down the staircase. The snow kept constantly falling. Uncle Tobias had given me the house key, so that I might go home when I liked. Till two o'clock I did not miss a single waltz, but by that time I had had enough: the refreshments were getting into my head. I went out.

Directly I was in the street I felt better, and so began to deliberate whether I should go back again or go home and go to bed. I should have liked to go on dancing, but on the other hand I was sleepy.

At last I decided to go home, and started on my way for the street Saint Sylvester, groping along the wall, and reasoning with myself as I went. I had walked on in this way for about ten minutes, and was just going to turn the corner by the fountain, when, happening by chance to look up, I saw behind the trees a moon as red as a hot coal, coming right at me through the skies. It was still millions of miles away, but it was moving so fast that it would be over us in a quarter of an hour. This sight almost knocked me down; I felt my hair already shrivelling up, and I said to myself: "It is the comet! Zacharias Piper was right!" And without knowing what I was doing, I ran to the mayoralty, climbed up the stairs, upsetting those who were coming down, and cried out, in a terrified voice: "The comet! the comet!"

The dance was at its merriest; the big drum was thundering; the young fellows were stamping their feet; the girls looked as red as poppies; but when my voice was heard in the room, crying, "The comet! the comet!" there was a profound silence, and every one turned pale.

Sergeant Duchêne, darting to the door, seized hold of me, put his hand over my mouth, and said: "Are you mad? Hold your tongue, will you?"

But I, staggering backwards, kept repeating, in a tone of despair: "The comet! the comet!"

Immediately, a thundering of footsteps was to be heard down the staircase; every one rushed out, the women groaning; indeed, the uproar was fearful. In a few minutes the room was quite empty. Duchêne left me, and being exhausted, I leant on a window-sill and watched the people running up the street; then I went off too, mad with despair.

As I passed the refreshment counter I saw the sutler, Catherine Lagoutte, and Corporal Bouquet emptying a bowl of punch. "Short life and a merry ending!" they were saying.

On the steps outside a number of people were seated, and were confessing to each other. One said, "I have been a usurer!" another, "I have used false weights!" another, "I have cheated at cards!" They were all talking together, and from time to time they interrupted themselves to cry out for mercy. Among them I recognized the old baker, Fèvre, and mother Lanritz; they were striking their breasts, and looking perfectly miserable.

But I did not pay much attention to all these things, for I had sins enough of my own to think of.

I soon caught up those who were running to the fountain. There it was terrible indeed to hear the groanings. Every one saw immediately

that it was really the comet; and as for me, I thought that it had already doubled in size. It seemed to be darting out lightnings, and the profound blackness of the night made it appear as red as blood. The crowd kept repeating, in a voice of lamentation :

"It is finished ! it is finished ! and we are lost !"

The women called on Saint Joseph, Saint Christopher, Saint Nicolas ; in short, on all the saints in the calendar. At this moment every sin I had ever committed seemed to come before my mind, and I felt a horror of myself. I trembled from head to foot as I thought that we were now going to be burnt. On his crutches, close by me, was the old beggar Balthazar. I turned to him and embraced him, saying : "Balthazar, when you are in heaven, you will remember me, will you not ?"

He replied, sobbing : "I am myself a great sinner, Monsieur Christian : I have been deceiving the parish for these thirty years, from the love of idleness, for I am not as lame as you think."

"And as for me, Balthazar," I went on, "I am the greatest criminal in Hunebourg."

We were almost weeping in each other's arms.

We had all been on our knees there for a quarter of an hour, when Sergeant Duchêne arrived quite out of breath. He had run first towards the arsenal, and seeing nothing down there, he came back by the street of the Capuchins.

"Well !" said he, "what on earth made you cry out ?"

Then, perceiving the comet : "Thunder alive !" exclaimed he, "what is that ?"

"It is the end of the world, sergeant," said Balthazar.

"The end of the world ?"

"Yes, the comet."

Duchêne began to swear furiously, crying out : "If the adjutant were but here . . . one would have the word of command."

Then, all of a sudden, he drew his sabre, and gliding along against the wall, exclaimed : "Forward ! What do I care for it ? I'll reconnoitre, myself."

Every one admired his courage ; as for me, I was quite carried away by his audacity, and determined to follow him. We went along slowly, staring at the comet, which kept increasing visibly in size, as if it were travelling millions of miles every second.

At last we arrived at the corner of the old convent of the Capuchins. The comet now appeared to mount up ; the more we advanced, the more it mounted ; we were obliged to raise our heads ; at last Duchêne had quite to bend his neck backwards and look straight up into the air. I was a few steps further off, and was looking at the comet a little sideways. I was considering within myself if it were prudent to go any further, when suddenly the sergeant stopped, and said in a low voice : "Good heavens ! it is the street lantern !"

"The lantern !" I exclaimed, running forward, "can it be so ?"

I looked up quite wonderstruck. It was indeed the old lantern of the Capuchin Convent. It is not usually lit, because there have been no monks there since 1798, and because the inhabitants of Hunebourg generally go to bed with the cocks and hens ; but on this night, the watchman, Burrhus, foreseeing that there would be a good many tipsy people about, before he went to bed himself, charitably thought he would put a candle into the old lantern, so as to prevent people from tumbling into the ditch, which goes along by the old cloisters. We could now clearly distinguish the lantern between the branches of the trees. The snuff of the candle was as thick as one's thumb, and when there was a little gust of wind, this snuff caught fire, and threw out as it were flashes of lightning, and this is what seemed to move forward like a comet. When I saw all this, I was just going to call out to let the rest of the people know, when the sergeant stopped me, saying : "Hold your tongue ! If it were known that we had made a charge at a lantern, we should get finely laughed at. Listen to me. Attention !"

He unhooked the rusty chain ; the lantern fell, making a tremendous noise. After this off we ran.

The rest of the people waited a long time, but as the comet was extinct, they at last plucked up courage and went off to bed.

The next morning there was a report that the comet had been extinguished through the prayers of Maria Finck ; so from that day she was looked on even as more of a saint than before.

This is how things happen in the good little town of Hunebourg.



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"Grandma, I'll never be naughty. Never."

EDMUND EVANS

M. ELLEN EDWARDS